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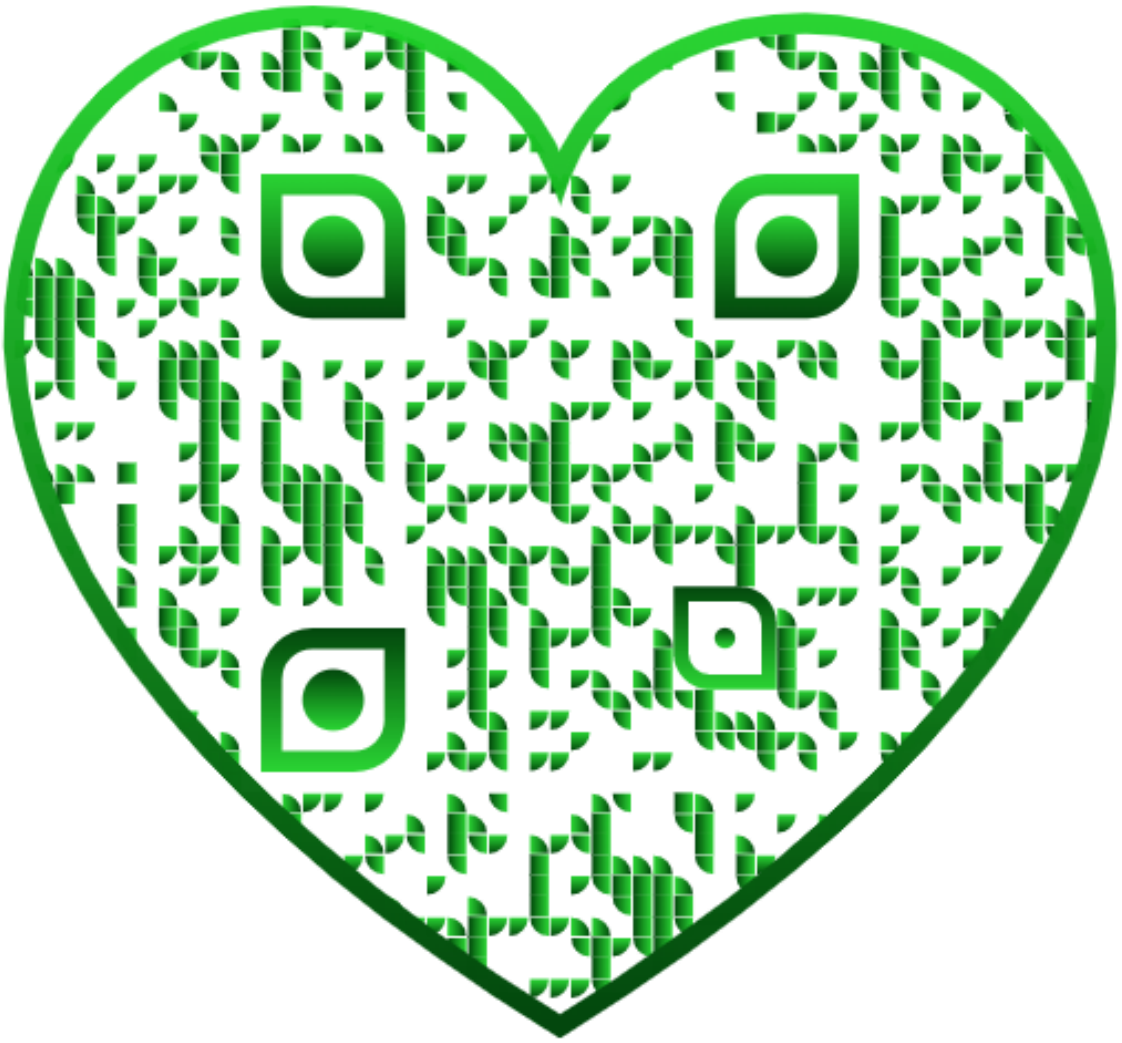
Flatpicking Guitar Magazine

Volume 6, Number 5 July/August 2002

Dan Kessinger Rebecca Hoggan Lucas LD18/3 LSH



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How to Duplicate & Promote an Acoustic CD Release

1. **Send your music to radio.** No matter how you define your goals, you need to get your music to folk radio. One excellent way to do this is through a **radio-oriented sampler CD program**, such as the OASISACOUSTIC™ sampler CDs, which get the music of Oasis clients to hundreds of key radio stations throughout the U.S.

2. **Find distribution.** When people hear your music on the radio and want to buy the CD, will they be able to find it? If you make your CD with Oasis, they will. Here's why: Oasis clients automatically qualify for national distribution through Valley Media, the nation's largest full-line distributor. This means your CD is automatically available at all of the biggest Internet music stores: CDnow, Amazon.com, Music Boulevard, TotalE.com, etc. Your CD is also available for special-order distribution in all the big retail chains: Borders, Camelot, etc.

3. **Think "retail-friendly" when packaging your CD.** Your CD needs to look as good as it sounds. While jewel-box packaging is still very popular, as an alternative you may want to consider eye-catching **cardboard substitutes for the jewel box.** such as the patented **Oasis Jewel-Free™ Box**.

4. **Work with a reputable duplication company:**

• **Ask for references.** Who are the company's clients? Do they include artists and labels you respect? (Oasis is proud of our work, for example, with Trout Fishing in America, David Wilcox, Trapezoid, Chris Smither, Brooks Williams, Steven King, Salamander Crossing...)

• **Do they understand your music and your market?** If you're going to Kerrville for the first time, do they understand what this means? If your guitar sounds too tinny, do they know how to fix it? Nerissa Nields (The Nields) says "We love dealing with a company that knows and cares who we are. Oasis is fantastic; they manufactured our CDs in time to make sure we had them for our CD release at the Iron Horse. And the quality is superb."

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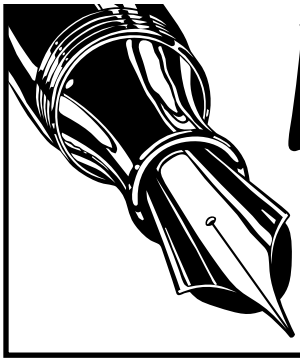


EDITOR'S PAGE

Flatpicking Guitar Back Issues

I wanted to let everyone who may be interested in our back issues know that our entire first volume is starting to run very low. We have already run out of Volume 1 numbers 1 & 2 (Steve Kaufman and David Grier covers, respectively) and we currently have less than 50 copies left of both the Beppe Gambetta issue (Volume 1, Number 4) and the Norman Blake issue (Volume 1, Number 5). The Jack Lawrence issue (Volume 1, Number 3) is also running low. If you do not have these back issue and have been thinking about purchasing them, now is the time!

In addition to the Volume 1 issues, our other most popular issues (Doc Watson, Tony Rice, and Clarence White covers) are also starting to run low. Get them while they last!

Roanoke Bluegrass Weekend

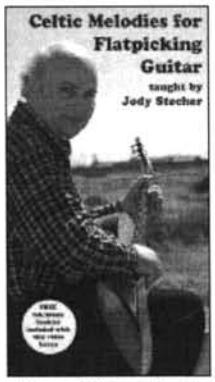
For the past three years John Lawless and I have put on a wonderful event in Roanoke, Virginia, called the Roanoke Bluegrass Weekend. Because of difficulties booking the hotel, this year's event was up in the air. I've even told a number of people that it was not going to happen in 2002. I am happy to report that I was wrong. The Roanoke Bluegrass Weekend is still on for 2002! It will not be held at the Hotel Roanoke, but it is definitely on. All of the details regarding the accommodations and instructors are still being ironed out press time. However, by the time you receive this issue, all of those details should be available at the website: www.roanokebluegrass.com. I will be attending the event to help facilitate the guitar workshops, however, John Lawless and Herschel Sizemore have taken over all of the administrative duties and will be your hosts for this year's event. The dates this year will be November 8, 9, and 10. If you have questions, call John at 540-776-6822.

Welcome Dan Crary

I'd like to welcome Dan Crary to our fine group of columnists and contributors. Dan's column "The Solo Flatpicker" will be appearing in just about every issue for as long as he wishes to remain with us. He has already sent me three columns and three recordings, so we are off to a great start. We look forward to having Dan's valuable input and instruction for years to come. Welcome Dan!

Bluegrass Lead Guitar
taught by Scott Nygaard

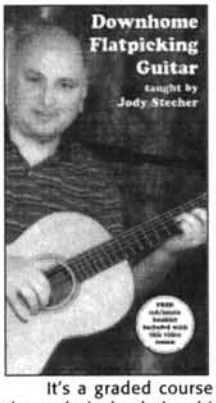
In this video, renowned guitarist Scott Nygaard guides you through the old-time fiddle tune *Little Billy Wilson*, a crosspicking arrangement of *Home Sweet Home*, a melodic solo on the blues song *Trouble in Mind* and shows you how to combine these influences when creating a solo on a bluegrass tune like *East Virginia Blues*. Scott explains in detail the techniques needed to master the bluegrass lead guitar style and the ideas behind his arrangements. All are clearly illustrated in split-screen close-ups. ***GW604 $29.95***



Celtic Melodies for Flatpicking Guitar
taught by Jody Stecher

The colorful tones of the guitar are well suited to the music of Ireland and Scotland. Jody Stecher has developed a unique approach to flatpicking Celtic music drawing on the sounds and techniques of the harp, fiddle and pipes. This video lesson presents a graded course starting with simpler fingering with special attention to picking techniques. Building on a base of a confident and deliberate right hand, more challenging left hand work is gradually introduced.

Titles include: ***Reel*** *Sheehan's Reel •* ***Jig*** *The Connaughtman's Rambles •* ***March*** *A Trip To Mabou Ridge •* ***Strathspey*** *The Devil In The Kitchen •* ***Reel*** *Muilleann Dubh •* ***Reel*** *Doctor Gilbert* ***GW605 $29.95***



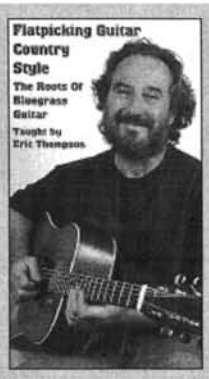
Downhome Flatpicking Guitar
taught by Jody Stecher

Jody Stecher has long been America's least generic flatpicker. This video is both a roadmap of Jody's development as a flatpicking guitarist of mostly American vernacular music, and a guide to how any flatpicker can expand their expressive technique. Think of it as *"Flatpicking According to Jody"*.

It's a graded course starting with basics in which the technical relationship between fingerpicking and flatpicking is made clear. The first few pieces are great songs with memorable melodies but minimal fingering so that right hand fundamentals can be mastered. With each new tune more techniques are introduced and more and more fingerboard is used, both horizontally and vertically. The second half of the video is purely instrumental music and the tunes are more complex.

Titles include: Carter's Blues, It's Hard To Love, I Got A Bulldog, Leake County Blues, Arkansas Traveler, The Dawn and The Ship in Full Sail ***GW606 $29.95***

Flatpicking Guitar Country Style
The Roots of Bluegrass Guitar
Taught by Eric Thompson



Eric Thompson will have you flatpicking lead breaks in styles from Maybelle Carter to Doc Watson. You'll learn to pick out the melody to songs like *East Virginia Blues, Sad and Lonesome Day* and *Shady Grove*. You will learn to embellish your playing with "hammer-ons" and "pull-offs" for the real old-time country sound. You'll build a solid technique, advancing step-by-step through single note arrangements of *Thompson's Rag*, fiddle hoedowns *Arkansas Traveler* and *Soldier's Joy*, and a bluesy bluegrass break for *Good Old Mountain Dew* (employing slippery slides and hot runs). Eric's invaluable tips on left hand fingering and right hand pick technique are clearly illustrated in split-screen close-ups.

GW 601 $29.95

Flatpicking Fiddle Tunes
Reels, Rags & Hoedowns
Taught by Eric Thompson

Old-time fiddle tunes are the bedrock upon which acoustic guitar flatpicking is built. Eric Thompson's strong, melodic picking has set a benchmark for taste and tone for nearly four decades. In this video Eric shares soulful arrangements of seven of his favorites, guiding you slowly, line-by-line through classics like *Texas Gals, Fish In The Millpond,* Scottish-Irish rooted *Miller's Reel* and *Stony Point,* mountain modal *Falls of Richmond,* swingin' *Kennedy Rag* and the bouncy *East Tennessee Blues.* You'll build your repertoire and hone your technique, exploring fingering patterns in six different keys which are all clearly illustrated in split-screen close-ups. ***GW 602 $29.95***

Bluegrass Crosspicking Guitar
Taught by Eric Thompson

Crosspicking is an exciting flatpicking technique that is an essential part of every bluegrass guitarist's arsenal. Utilizing repeated patterns on three-string groups, crosspicking captures the bounce of a fiddler's double shuffle and the drive of three-finger banjo Scruggs-style rolls. Eric Thompson lays it out for you in easy to understand steps, illustrating the basic patterns with arrangements of *Fly Around My Pretty Little Miss, Blackberry Rag, Beaumont Rag, Wildwood Flower,* and *Cross-eyed Fiddler.* Split-screen close-ups let you see exactly what and how Eric is playing. ***GW 603 $29.95***

Beginner's Country Guitar
taught by Fred Sokolow

All you need to put over a good country song is your voice and a guitar. This video lesson gives you the tools you need to play old-fashioned country, honky-tonk and country rock. You'll learn how to play: Accompaniment strums for different rhythmic feels; a variety of first-position chords; bass runs; major scales; solos and turnarounds.

Tunes include: Blue Eyes Crying In The Rain, I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry, The Bottle Let Me Down, I'm Movin' On, Will The Circle Be Unbroken, Silver Wings and Jambalaya, ***GW407 $29.95***

Flatpicking Country Classics
taught by Fred Sokolow

In this 75 minute video Fred teaches nine standards every country picker/singer should know... from start to finish. You'll learn an intro for each song, a backup pattern and bass runs to play while singing, an instrumental solo, and an ending. Picking up where his *BEGINNER'S COUNTRY GU1TAR* video left off, Fred keeps the arrangements fairly simple but includes a few up-the-neck chord positions and hot licks. You'll learn solos and runs in five different keys. Each song is played at regular speed and then slowed down on a split-screen that gives you a close-up look at the picking hand and the chording hand.

Tunes include: New San Antonio Rose, Wild Side of Life, Waltz Across Texas, The Race is On, Beautiful Kentucky Waltz, That's the Way Love Goes, I Don't Hurt Anymore, Someone I Used To Know and City of New Orleans ***GW410 $29.95***

Basic Country Flatpicking Guitar
taught by Dix Bruce

Hot guitar licks abound these days but simple melodies played along with chord strums on the low strings of the guitar have never lost their appeal. Pioneered in the 1920s by the great Mother Maybelle Carter, this combination of lead and rhythm guitar playing is the foundation upon which all traditional country, folk, bluegrass, and hot flatpicking guitar is based. In this video lesson Dix Bruce carefully teaches lead and backup guitar to nine great and classic country, bluegrass, and folk standards, ballads and hot breakdowns played by musicians the world over.

Tunes include: Worried Man Blues, Lonesome Valley, Storms Are On the Ocean, Handsome Molly, Wildwood Flower, Redwing, John Hardy, Jimmie Brown the Newsboy ***GW308 $29.95***

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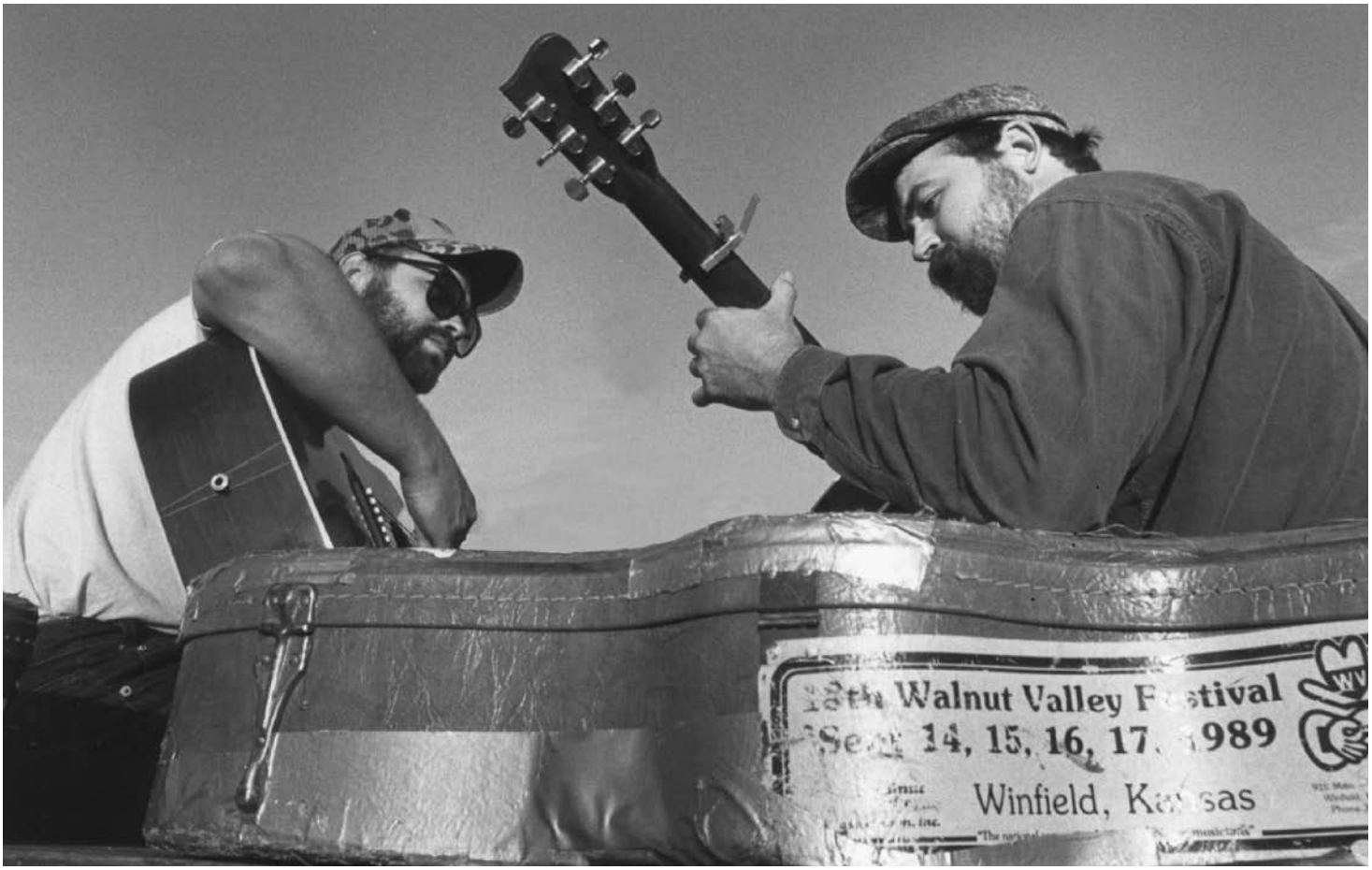
West Virginia's

Robin Kessinger

By Skip Staples



Robin Kessinger (right) jamming with his brother Dan

Flatpicking champions are an interesting lot. They are always easily approachable and eager to talk with other guitar players. In addition, they usually have great stories to tell about their own experiences and the people they've met along the way. Robin Kessinger is certainly at the top of this list. He is one of America's leading flatpickers.

Born into a family of famous musicians (which included legendary fiddler Clark Kessinger), Robin first gained national attention in his own right by winning the 1985 National Guitar Championship in Winfield, Kansas. He is well-known for his wide and varied repertoire and versatility. As Steve Kaufman wrote in the liner notes to Robin's CD *Raw Guitar*, "Robin can come up with more obscure, incredible tunes than any other flatpicker I know. I always learn new tunes from Robin whether I am sitting there picking with him or picking it off his recordings." In addition to playing well himself, Robin is very effective at teaching others how to play. His students consistently praise his ability to communicate with them in ways that inspire and encourage their continued dedication to the instrument. He teaches in both private lessons and workshops including the Augusta Heritage Workshops in Elkin, West Virginia; the Allegheny Echoes Workshops in Marlinton, West Virginia; and at Steve Kaufman's Flatpicking Camps in Maryville, Tennessee.

Robin's fame has spread well beyond the borders of West Virginia and America, making him an international artist. He has appeared often on national radio and television and on the BBC; he is prominent on the nationally televised documentary *West Virginia Film History* produced by the West Virginia Humanities Council; and has toured Ireland and performed at Japan's International Bluegrass Association Festival.

In April of 2002 Robin Kessinger, Brance Gillihan, Dan Miller, and I spoke at Brance's studio in Pulaski, Virginia. We talked flatpicking while sharing Subway sandwiches around Brance's snazzy blue suede tablecloth. We started right off into

Robin's personal history of learning to play.

Robin began playing when he was twelve but his first exposure to a guitar wasn't planned. As Robin tells it, "Someone left a guitar there at the house for a couple of weeks. Dad was showing me some chords on it and saw I was interested." Soon afterwards, he had his own guitar. "It was a Ventura. It had paint bristle on it where they had painted it with a brush in shellac, but it was a good sounding guitar. I think we paid about $250 for it in 1968."

The Kessinger family was well-known for old-time mountain music, which meant Robin wasn't often exposed to guitar as a lead instrument. In fact, his view of the guitar world in those days was limited to a few record albums. "When I first started playing, I had this recording by Chet Atkins and Jerry Reed. And I had one of Doc Watson. So I figured Chet's pretty good because he's got more than one album. And Doc's pretty good because he's got one."

Robin also gained exposure to lead guitar from a family friend, Robert Rutland. Through Robert, Robin began to build a lead repertoire. "Robert knew all these tunes and that's where I learned them from. Robert was influenced by Uncle Clark and transposed the tunes to guitar and I learned them from Robert. So in a roundabout way, I was influenced by my Uncle Clark."

Consequently, Robin's sparse exposure to lead guitar resulted in development of his unique style. During these years, Robin found it difficult to find other pickers of his skill level. "Ever since I was thirteen years old, the only time I ever got with anybody, I could outpick 'em. They were just chording around and stuff. And I was always teaching my friends how to back me up. There were no other guitar players. So I figured I must be the third or fourth best guitar player in the world behind Chet, Doc and Robert [laughs]. I'm serious. You know, that's a teenage brain working. My rhythms are different, too, because I wasn't always listening to guitar rhythm. I was listening to banjo or mandolin rhythm or bass or piano, wherever I was learning the tunes from."

Since the family lived away from West Virginia for several years, Robin only played with his Uncle Clark now and again, but he has fond memories of it. From Great-Uncle Clark on down, music has always been a big part of the Kessinger family. Robin's dad is a well-known mandolin player. His younger brother Dan started with the ukulele, moved on to fiddle, and then guitar. (There is more information on Dan Kessinger in this issue). And Robin's son Luke is also a talented guitar player.

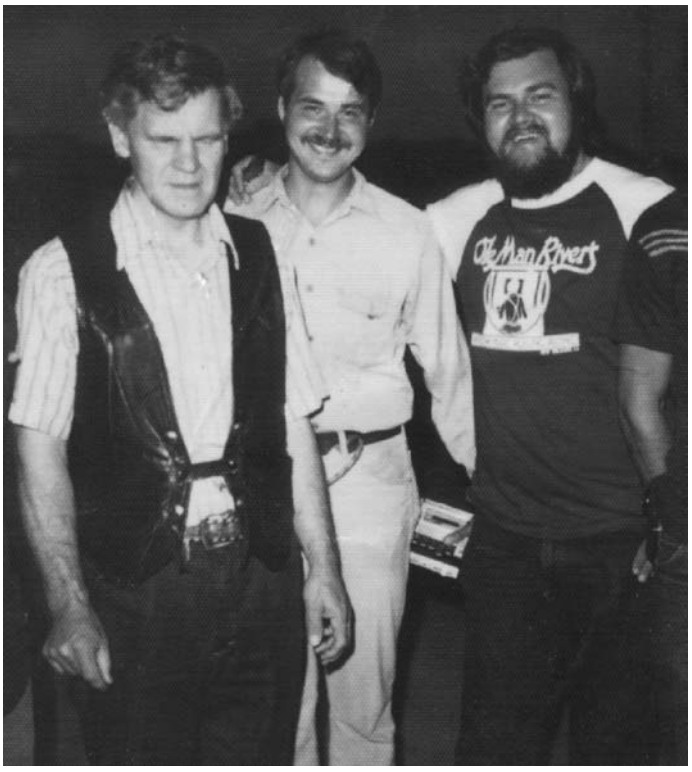
Even though music was important in the family, Robin's parents were not fond of the idea of him playing at festivals in those days. He didn't attend his first until he was 17, but that one turned out great.

"I told my mom, 'You know, I think I'd like go to one.' And she said, 'Well, that would be okay if you weren't married.' They were just being protective. They were afraid I was going to fall in with a wrong crowd or something. But when this one came to town, I'd made up my mind I was going to go. So I called my dad and told him. He said, 'Well, I'll be down there.' It was a block from my house in a big field. So the first contest I ever went to, I won, but there were only three guitar players in the contest. I thought I was the only guitar player so I knew I was going to win it before I entered it. Anyway, I won the contest. And I thought, 'Well, I won this one. No problem. Piece of cake. Hey, I might be able to make a good living doing this' [laughs]. From that one I found out about Galax. And I thought, 'Well, I'll just go to Galax and win that one, too'. So Galax was only the second festival I'd been to."

Robin began to get an idea that there were other lead guitar pickers in the world upon arrival at Galax. "I started hearing some guitar players. I heard Wayne Henderson. And I kept hearing him at night. I'd get in my tent in my sleeping bag, and I'd hear him playing "Forked Deer." I'd hurry up and get my clothes on. By the time I got them on and unzipped the tent to go out, it would stop. And so the third night, I hurried up and I saw this little guy picking the guitar. I could see him playing, but I wouldn't get any closer to him than 25 feet or so. I was that bashful. I wanted to get up there closer to it and listen to it, but I'd stay back and watch him. And I thought, 'Man, that guy's pretty good.' He was the first one I heard. And then the day of the contest, there's a big line of people and they've all got guitars. There were about 230 or 240 of them. And I said, 'That's insane. There's not that many guitar players in the world. There's just not. There can't be.' So I got in line. I got to listen to a bunch of them. Man, all these guys were good. I saw Steve Kilby. Galax was a real eye opener. It was like a dose of the real world. I didn't even place in it. That was my lesson that there's a lot of flatpickers out there and anybody can beat you, too."

Rather than discouragement, Robin felt excited to learn that so many other flatpickers actually existed. He continued to play at festivals, and would soon win the prestigious National Flatpicking Championship at Winfield. Recalling the Winfield experience, Robin says, "The first year I went to Winfield was '82. I won second place that year. The next year I didn't place at all, but I met a lot of good guitar players that year."

Robin won Winfield in 1985. With the National Championship under his belt,



Robin with Doc and Merle Watson in 1978 in Ripley, West Virginia

Robin with his father, Bob Kessinger, and his brother Dan

Robin returned to Galax in 1989 and 1990. He won Galax both years and was awarded Best Overall Entertainer for both years as well.

Robin admits that contest preparation was easier for him in younger days, but he still enjoys it. Serious contest pickers are known to work on material for months, but Robin has a different approach. He usually doesn't decide what he's going to play until the day of the contest. "The last time I placed in Winfield, three or four years ago, I played "Kansas City Kitty" for the first time in a contest. I didn't know what I was going to play that day. I thought 'I'm just going to play something that feels good.' That one felt good. There was lots of adrenaline. I like that feeling. It's the same kind of feeling if you're jumping off a high dive."

Robin is known among flatpickers for having a wide repertoire of traditional songs. He admits to knowing a lot of different tunes from most other guitar players. "When I found out that I knew some tunes that other people didn't know, I thought that might be a strong point, to research all these tunes, especially these old-timey fiddle tunes. That's what I grew up listening to. A great source for theses tunes was Roger Cooper, a fiddler from Vanceburg, Kentucky."

Robin's guitar skills and knowledge of so many great and varied tunes keep him busy performing with many different people and groups. "I play in a contra band called The Contrarians. That stretches me out because I don't play rhythm with these guys; I just do fillers. It's a lot of fun and a challenge to play fillers and try to come in between everything else. I recommend a square dance or contra band for players who want to practice their licks. I toured Ireland with a guitar player named Pete O'Hanlon. His influences were traditional Celtic fiddling, Doc Watson and Jerry Reed. And mine were a whole bunch of fiddling, a little bit of Doc Watson and Jerry Reed. So we toured the entire island all the way around and through the middle.

We asked Robin about playing with the locals while in Ireland and if the tunes were similar. "About 85% of the Appalachian tunes that have been over here for a long time are pretty much Celtic. Any mountain tune, it probably came from over there one way or another."

Robin also performs at Charleston's *Mountain Stage Special* and has toured with folk singer Kate Long. He was recently asked to provide music for television, too. "I was on a PBS TV documentary about West Virginia and I was one of the musicians selected to play the music behind it. The credits say Robin Kessinger on banjo." [laughs]

Robin teaches and books other guitar instructors for the Augusta Heritage Workshops in Elkin, West Virginia each year. He has also been busy in the studio. "I did a thing with Johnny Staats and Robert Shafer. It's done. We're just waiting for the liner notes and waiting for Johnny to come in from coon hunting long enough to get his picture taken."

Robin enjoys playing unusual venues and again his vast knowledge of tunes serves him well in this regard. Recently he has backed up poetry readings by some West Virginia artists. "I got to play behind some of the poets. That's fun; I like that. Sometimes I improvise as they read their poetry. Somebody might be reading something very sensitive, and I'll throw in a hot lick just for fun. You have to be careful, though."

He also gives guitar lessons to 35 students per week. Sometimes a new student will ask to learn a specific song from a recording. When this happens, Robin offers them a counter proposal. "If they're a beginner and they bring in a tape of Crosby, Stills, and Nash, they're not going to understand that some of those things have two guitars and one of them is playing a C-chord and the other is playing an Am7 over top of it. They have to know the chords before they can play like that. I might say, 'Look, I can show you how to play this, but it's not going to sound exactly like this. Maybe we might start out with the melody and the basic chords. We'll start on a simple two-chord song like 'Flop-Eared Mule.' I want to make sure they can hear the changes. If they can't hear the changes, then I have to change my strategy with them. I write out the chords for them. And I'll do a real simplified all down strokes instead of down-ups and leave out part of the tune until they can hear the changes for that tune."

Robin stresses that the relationship between student and teacher is actually an important part of the learning process and that guitar practice should be fun. "I like to have fun with it and make sure the student has fun with it, too. If I was looking for a teacher, I would want someone who's fun and doesn't make it a chore. Find someone who can make things very, very simple for the student to where he can understand them."

Robin also teaches advanced students who occasionally seek his help to get past some block or hurdle. He warns, "A common problem with guitar players is that they reach a plateau after about the first two years of playing and it keeps happening from time to time afterwards. You get

in a rut about every two years. You just have to fight through it by playing. It still happens to me."

We asked Robin about the importance and proper positioning of the right (picking) hand in his playing. "When teaching, I work on the right hand more so now than I used to. Sometimes you'll get a beginner who doesn't touch any of the guitar with anything except the pick. I'll suggest three or four things, posting, laying your wrist down on your guitar, just to get comfortable. And don't let a whole bunch of your pick stick out because you'll get a lot of flap and you can control it better. And I'll give some right hand drills. Most people don't think about the right hand. They're always looking at the left hand flying. The right hand is where the sound comes out. Sometimes, to get more volume, I'll lift my right arm off the guitar completely. I might rest the flat of my thumb on the bass string, or I might grab hold of the first string with my pinkie and hang on. That's the way I stabilize. But my most comfortable position is to lay the heel of my hand right on the bridge."

Robin prefers a 1mm Dunlop pick and is known for playing guitars made by Don Gallagher of Wartrace, TN. Recently, he's been playing a guitar made by that first picker he heard at Galax so many years ago, Wayne Henderson. "I've been waiting for a Henderson since the first time I met Wayne at Galax. The deal was I was supposed to bring him a truck load of walnut and he was going to build me a guitar. Dad had all these walnut trees on the farm. And I told Dad what Wayne was going to do and he said, 'Robin, there's no way that guitar is worth as much as these walnut trees.' He didn't know what a craftsman Wayne Henderson was."

Robin's dad was never convinced so Robin didn't get a Henderson guitar at that time, but many years later, Wayne asked Robin again and a deal was struck. "He custom-made the neck to fit my hand. It's very easy to play. And he made the pickguard a little thicker because I wear a ditch out in them. I judged his contest two years in a row and never had to take him that load of walnut from my dad's trees. One of the most important things to me about the instruments is the person who makes them. Wayne Henderson is a very nice person and so is Don Gallagher." Additionally, Robin has a 1955 Martin D-18 that was willed to him by a good friend, Hunt Charach. His collection also includes a very loud maple guitar made for him by Jim Triggs.

An early issue of *Flatpicking Guitar Magazine* (Volume 1, Number 2, Jan/Feb 1997) includes an article on Robin. Since then he has found an unusual new hobby, one that requires him to dress in buckskins and shun modern conveniences. The Mountain Men share a love of early American history and are dedicated to authenticity in their clothing, tools, and weapons. "I like history and I've always liked making bows and arrows, looking for arrowheads and things like that. I didn't know there were other adults who liked to play cowboys and Indians still. Galen Brown told me about it first at Winfield. He said he was a member. They do re-enactments. They go to schools. They set up in these big fields for school kids to come through and see how people used to live. They're very much like traditional musicians. You have to be authentic. And if you're not, they'll point it out to you. For example, you might have a screw on your musket and someone will notice that and say, 'You can't have that on there. They didn't have titanium back then.' The photo of me was taken at a primitive black-powder shoot. You are required to dress according to your weapon. As long as you're between around the Revolutionary time period, you're okay. That's a French trapper's hat I'm wearing and a frontiersman shirt. The fringe has a purpose other than decoration. If it's raining or you're sweating, the fringe wicks the moisture away from your body. I never knew that until I started getting into it. A lot of these guys have never heard of flatpicking or Robin Kessinger. I can do pretty good with the recordings plus I'm getting some gigs from the Mountain Men. And they do like the music."

Robin is happy about the current increase in popularity for traditional music, but is concerned that it may be a mixed blessing. "I think it's definitely made it more commercial, with more opportunities. But I'm always funny about trendy things. That's the only thing that bothers me. I don't want it to be trendy. When things are trendy, they're here full-blown and then they fall by the wayside and I don't want to see that happen. But it has helped as far as opportunities go. There are a lot of people who hear that music now who never would have heard it otherwise. It's an evolving thing, music. I think it's inevitable. It's going to change."

Robin and wife Mary have recently twice become grandparents. We asked Robin about plans for the future. "I want to do more recordings and I want to do a video. I'm planning on doing an instructional

Mountain Man Kessinger

video. I never have done one. I'm lucky enough that I can make a living now playing music. It's a very hard way to make a living, but I wouldn't trade it. The guitar is still my passion."

We look forward to many more years of great music from this gifted player and teacher from West Virginia. You can find out more about Robin Kessinger's music and his performance schedule by logging on to his website at www.fretnfiddle.com/robin.html. He can be reached at robinkess@newwave.net.

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The Third Eyebrow
Robin Kessinger
Duets (with Cathy Pearson)

Robin Kessinger picks with fellow West Virginian, and two time Winfield champion, Robert Shafer. Robert and Robin are currently working to finish a new project together.

On the audio CD companion to this issue Robin performs a fiddle tune medley, the first is a traditional old-time tune, "Growling Old Man, Growling Old Woman," and the second is a contra dance tune "Sligo Creek" written by Danny Noveck. On the two pages which follow we have transcribed Robin's first solo to each tune.

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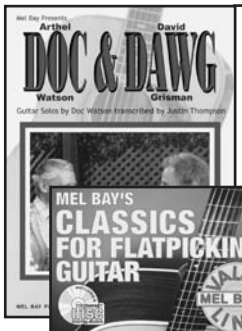

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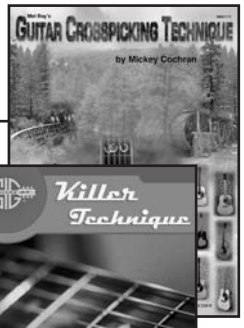

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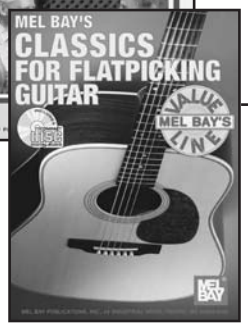

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Growling Old Man, Growling Old Woman

Arranged by Robin Kessinger
Transcribed by Brad Davis

Sligo Creek

Arranged by Robin Kessinger
Transcribed by Brad Davis

Durham Rangers

by Craig Vance

Here is an old tune that made its way into the repertoire of some of the dances I used to play for. I played rhythm guitar for these dances that were held at Arlington Hall and Ft. Belvoir in Virginia back in the late 70s and early 80s.

The fiddle player, whom I only knew as Blackie, was a walking encyclopedia of dance tunes, fiddle tunes, jigs, reels, and hornpipes. We'd play for, what seemed to me, hours without stopping. It was one tune into another until the dance was over. I never learned to pick all of them, but this one stuck in my head, and I heard it again sometime over the years and picked up on it then.

This can be played in an unlimited combination of tunes in the key of D major to form an interesting medley.

This will be one of the easier tunes to learn. I just got back from Ireland, and figured I'd give you all a break.

Happy pickin'.

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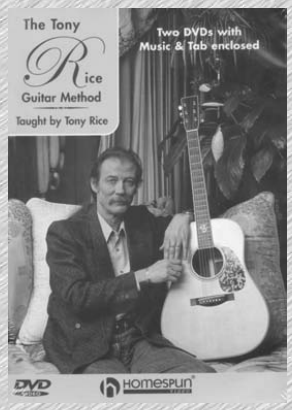

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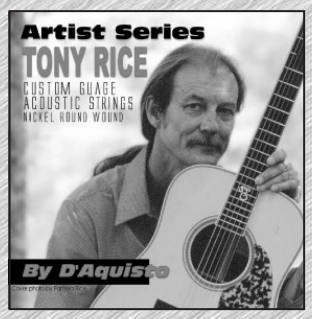

Durham Rangers

Arranged by Craig Vance

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Beginner's Page

by Dan Huckabee

Do you speak guitar?

Do you speak Spanish or for that matter, any language other than English? Do you speak that language as fluently as you do your primary language of English? Do you know a few phrases in Spanish? If you do, you know in your heart that you really can't honestly say that you "speak Spanish."

OK, you already know where I'm going with this. Do you speak "fluent" guitar? Now what in the world could that possibly mean? Wouldn't one person's definition of "fluent guitar" be totally different than another's? Probably so, but I'm going to give you my definition of "fluent guitar, " and by being so bold and arrogant, I'm going to help you to become a really great flatpicker.

A person does not have mastery over the language spoken on the guitar unless his guitar can carry on a "musical conversation" as well as he can carry a conversation in English. If you can play a dozen fiddle tunes on the guitar, you are not a guitarist and you do not speak guitar fluently. I am going to be so bold to say that you might know a thousand fiddle tunes on your guitar and still not be able to "speak the musical language of guitar" fluently. I have the right to say this because it is entirely possible to have memorized a thousand Spanish sentences (or even paragraphs), but not be able to converse successfully in Spanish. After all, it wouldn't be practical to start a conversation on a street corner in Mexico, and be confined only to the one thousand sentences that you have so painfully memorized.

So a "fluent guitarist" is one who can instantly play anything that he can instantly hum. A "fluent guitarist" (by my definition), has as much instant ability to produce a melody on his guitar as he does humming with his vocal chords. I'm sure you can hum any melody you've ever heard, but I bet you cannot play any melody you've ever heard on your guitar. I'm here to tell you that if you are guilty of this crime, that it will haunt you until you formally sit down and address this challenge.

The way you address this project is by trying to peck out every song you have ever heard, and write its name down on a tally sheet after you can play it through adequately. Perfecting it is unnecessary and will somewhat defeat the purpose. When I first started learning to sing as a child, I remember the teacher spending time with each phrase of the song and slowly building till we eventually learned to sing the whole song. Why? Because our vocal chords hadn't really learned exactly how much to tighten or loosen to produce just the right high or low note. At that stage, we had not mastered the musical instrument called the human voice.

By the time we were older we all could control this process of tightening and loosening our vocal chords and we didn't really need to learn to sing a simple melody by slowly being introduced to it one painful note at a time. By this time we had mastered the language of melody using the musical instrument that we call the human voice.

So, in other words, most of you have the musical voice mastered, the English language mastered, but you are like an American with a Spanish/English dictionary when it comes to your guitar.

Now you simply need to try to pick out: "American the Beautiful," "Star Spangled Banner," "Jingle Bells," the *Leave it to Beaver* theme-song, the *Bonanza* theme, "Oh Where Oh Where Has My Little Dog Gone," "Easter Parade," "Take Me Out to the Ball Game," "Happy Days are Here Again," "Hungarian Rhapsody," "Beethoven's 5th," "Yesterday," and so on.

It just doesn't matter where you get these melodies or what style of music they are. They could all be the background music for car commercials. All that matters is that you do so many that you get better and better at picking them out. The more you try, the more your intuition will develop. The more you try, the closer you will be to mastering the guitar. Your hands will eventually go to the right note just as your vocal chords do now. You don't have to search around for words to put together a sentence, but when you were a baby, you spoke in one-word sentences. So, are you a baby guitarist? You've mastered the English language and you can master Spanish or Guitar if you work on them diligently enough. By the time you've logged 100 silly tunes to your tally sheet, you will already see that the hundredth song is falling into place quicker than the first. Why? Experience! I'd venture to say that by the time you've logged a thousand songs that you will be speaking totally "Fluent Guitar." Can you imagine a better prerequisite for learning Tony Rice or Doc Watson licks?

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Flatpick Rhythm Guitar

by Joe Carr

Wayne Stewart and Poor Richard's Almanac

The album *Poor Richard's Almanac* was recorded in 1969 by a trio of young talented bluegrass musicians. Mandolinist/fiddler Sam Bush, banjo player Alan Munde, and guitarist Wayne Stewart recorded 18 instrumental tunes on the album. Bush and Munde went on to greater fame with New Grass Revival and Country Gazette, respectively. Wayne Stewart left music for a career as a minister.

The success of Bush and Munde prompted Texas guitarist Slim Richey to re-issue the album in 1976 on his Ridge Runner label. The album features high level playing from all involved and includes several tunes written by Bush, including "Poor Richard's Blues" which he wrote at age 13.

Stewart's rhythm guitar playing on the album is artful and innovative, especially for the time. Although Stewart was flatpicking lead solos during this period, it was not featured on this project. The flatpicked introduction to "Poor Richard's Blues" gives us a tantalizing taste of his skill. Stewart's unique rhythm guitar accompaniment to "Poor Richard's Blues" is an attractive and unique creation that perfectly sets off Bush's plaintive minor pentatonic melody.

Below is my arrangement of a guitar solo which is based on the mandolin melody Bush played. Stewart's introduction and rhythm follows on the next page. While this album is currently only available in vinyl, hopefully Ridge Runner will soon re-release it on CD for a new audience.

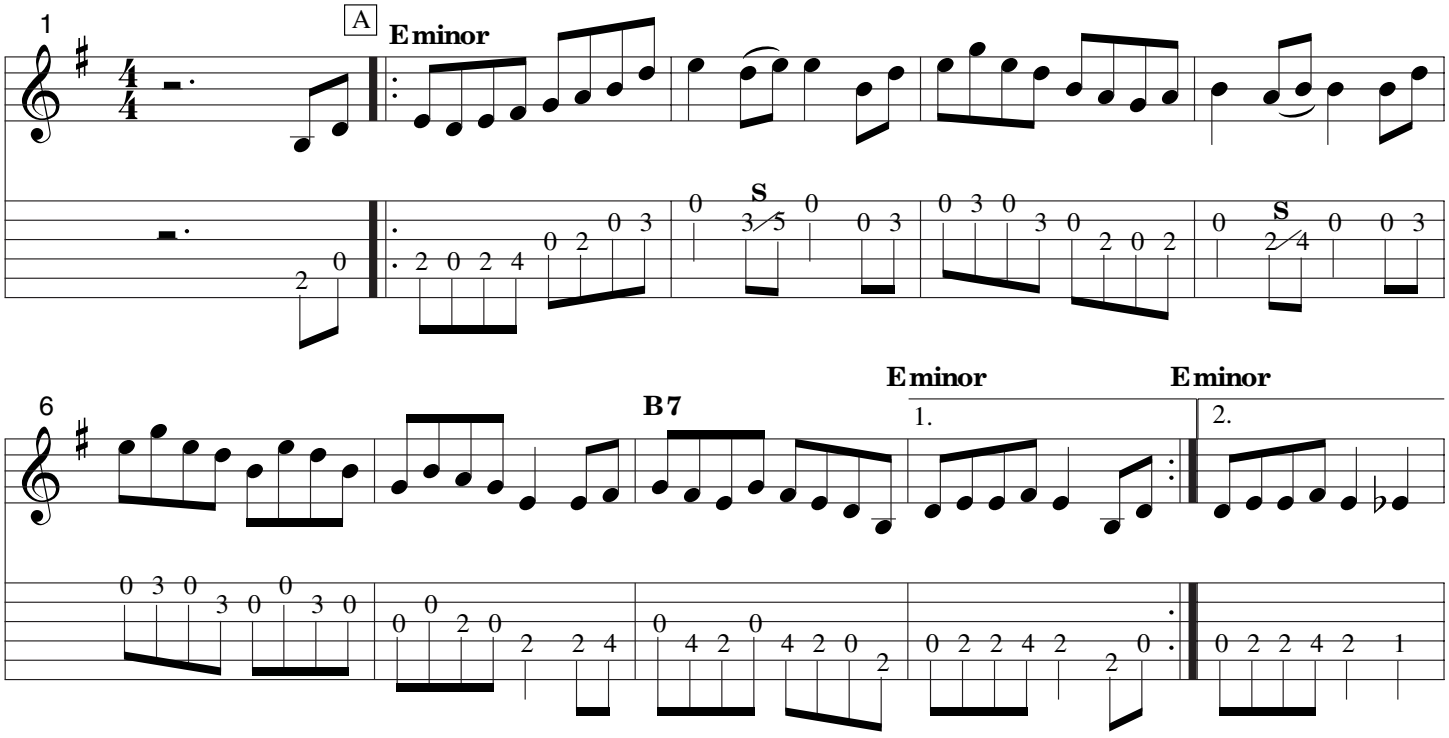
Performance Notes:

The slurs in the music indicate hammer-ons and pull-offs. In the interest of space, the C part of the tune is not transcribed in the rhythm music. Notice in the melody music that the four measure phrase at the beginning of the B part is repeated THREE times. On the recording, the sections are played in this order: ABABCABCABAB.

Poor Richard's Blues

Arranged by Joe Carr

Guitar Solo



Poor Richard's Blues (con't)

Poor Richard's Blues - Rhythm

Flatpicking & Folk/Acoustic Rock

by John Tindel

Little Wing

What's this? A Jimi Hendrix song in the pages of *Flatpicking Guitar Magazine*? Whatever is the world coming to! Well, I do have to justify the word "Rock" in my column heading somehow. Besides, this time I thought it'd be fun to do a real, live, snappy flatpicked version of this tune, departing from the typical slower, ballad-like tempo and hopefully not setting Jimi spinning in his grave.

Lord knows, there's been lots of great versions done of this song, probably because it's such a blast to play, as you'll soon find out. Originally heard on *Axis Bold as Love*, the song became one of the hits from that record, in part because of the trippy, Dylan-inspired lyrics (which we won't be getting into here, butterflies and zebras notwithstanding) but more importantly because of the lovely and melancholy majesty of its chord progression. Which, if you've never had the pleasure, is as follows:

Em G Am Em Bm Bflatm Am C G F C D

Simple, yes? The great ones often are. I've tabbed out a simple outline of the basic melody. Once you've worked out and learned this, the sky's the limit as far as improvisational opportunities go. Check out Eric Clapton and Duane Allman's take on it on their Derek and the Dominos record, as well as Tuck and Patty, Tony Rice, Laurence Juber and many more folks who have fine renditions out there. Not to mention the man his own bad self—Jimi Hendrix.

We kick off with a slide up from the open G string to the 2nd and then 4th fret, then to the 2nd string, 3rd fret sliding up to the 5th fret. On that first note of the run, use the open B string as a drone as you slide up to the B note on the string below it. Also use the high open E string likewise as a drone as you slide up on the B string to the E note as well. Unison drone strings are great to incorporate into solos because they effectively double your volume in those passages (2 strings ringing instead of 1) plus they allow the use of the "tension and release" principle, discussed in previous columns. Also it just sounds cool, which is reason enough in itself, right? The rest of the solo lays out pretty simply; just follow the tab and listen along to the CD. Good luck, and now you can say you know a Hendrix song!

Practice tip for this issue ... avoid falling into the habit of never working on difficult things. It's easier to just keep going over the stuff you already know rather than biting off the big chunks that may be harder to digest. In order to grow as musicians and guitar players we must keep pushing that envelope past the comfort level, so that someday, we can take to our Little Wings and fly.

I'd like to join the rest of the *Flatpicking Guitar Magazine* crew in welcoming Dan Crary to the fold with this issue. It's certainly an honor for me to share space with one of the true titans of flatpick style playing, who is an inspiration to us all. Big smiles all around!

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Little Wing

Jimi Hendrix **Arranged by John Tindel**

Guitar Maintenance and Repair

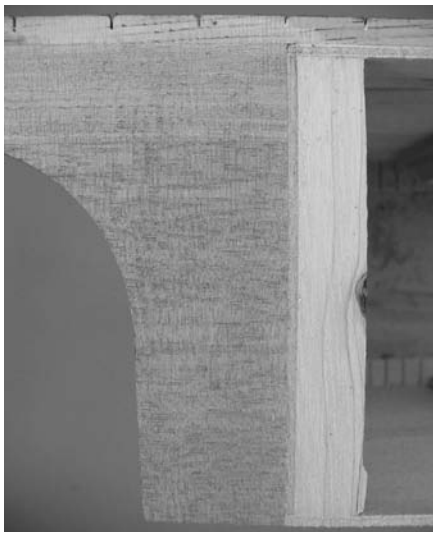
by Frank Ford

Neck Joint Diversity

I guess you might say this article is a response to some of the Internet discussion group stuff I've been reading lately. It seems the "controversy" over the structural and tonal characteristics of guitar neck joints has been heating up a bit lately. Devotees of the traditional dovetail construction often speak about that style of neck joint contributing to tonal superiority, while fans of more modern joints speak of the ease of removal for repair. In this short article, I'll present a bit of general information, and a few conclusions I've drawn from examples I've seen.

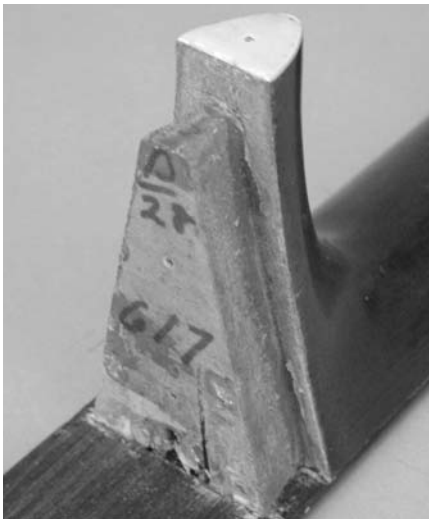
Probably the oldest style of guitar neck construction employs the "Spanish heel," and is generally used for classical guitars. There, the body is actually assembled around the neck, which completely eliminates the future removal of the neck. This particular style of construction is not often used for high quality steel string guitars, because it is generally accepted that there will come a time when it is desirable to remove and reset the neck to compensate for the settling and changes in body shape brought on by the relentless tension of steel strings tuned to pitch.

Inexpensive guitars, especially those imported from Asia, may also have nonremovable necks. The example below is a guitar neck joint in which the neck is simply glued in place with no reinforcement for the joint. Similar joinery is often used with dowels to align and reinforce the parts. Likewise, epoxy and other modern adhesives may be used to hold the neck on, but they, too, make it nearly impossible to remove the neck for repair.

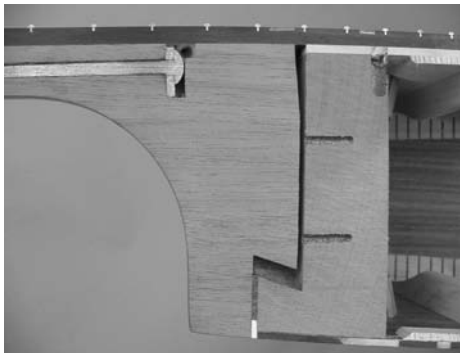


So, while such a neck may be securely mounted to the body, it's really not a good way to construct a steel string guitar, if future repair is to be any consideration.

The traditional high quality steel string neck joint, as seen on this Martin D-28 neck, is a tapered "dovetail" carved at the end of the neck heel, and set into a matching cavity in the neck block of the guitar:

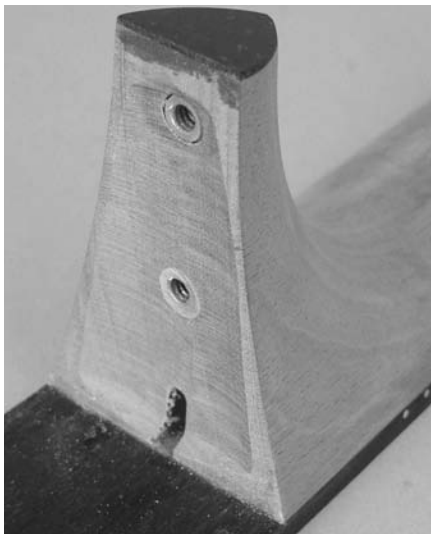


Here's a cross sectional view of the same type of joint, this time in a Gibson guitar:



As you can see, the dovetail section is set deeply into the neck block. In fact, the joint fits so well that it is often possible to string up the guitar without even gluing the neck in place. So, when it is glued up, it's generally accepted that a well fitted dovetail joint is one of the most secure of all woodworking joints. The gaps you see at the end and the bottom of the joint are the areas into which steam can be injected to release the glue at the edges of the dovetail joint which do the actual work of holding the neck on the body.

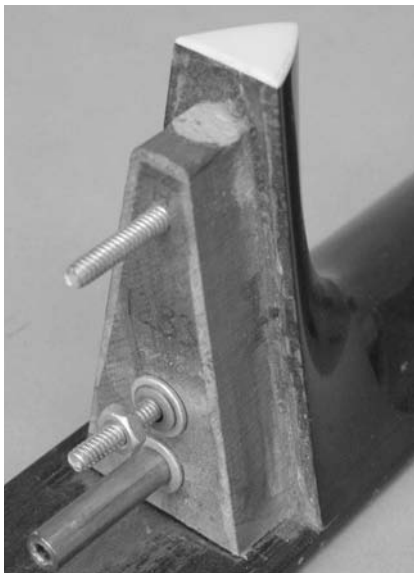
Almost 30 years ago, Taylor started building guitars using a bolted neck construction that was deceptively simple. In fact, the neck was bolted right to the body with two screws threaded into brass inserts in the heel of the neck:



Nothing to it. Just bolt the neck to the body, and take it loose when you need to repair the guitar. In those days, some of us wondered if the necks would stay securely in place because the joint seemed so simple. Of course, we should have known there was nothing to worry about because Gibson had pioneered a similar bolted construction for their banjo necks since the mid 1920s, and that style of construction had become an industry standard since then. Banjos have longer necks and much heavier bodies than guitars, so if such a joint worked on a banjo it certainly would work on a guitar.

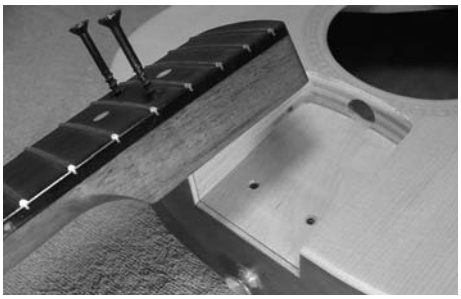
By now, bolted neck construction has become a standard for the steel string guitar, too. It has not completely replaced the more labor intensive glued dovetail, but more makers turn to bolted type joinery each year.

This Collings neck has a bolted mortise design, where the neck is set deep into the neck block, and is held in place by the threaded bolts rather than the tapered sides of the joint:



Just as in Taylor's early design, the neck is simply bolted in place, and the fingerboard is glued to the top of the guitar. To remove either style of neck, you need to break the glue joint under the fingerboard, loosen the bolts, and the neck comes right off. This mortise design allows the neck to be heavier and stronger through the heel section, potentially reducing the chances of breakage in a fall.

Another type of bolted neck joint is reminiscent of the Fender style solid body electric guitar.



This one is a Taylor "Baby" neck joint. Years ago, the low priced Asian guitars also had this style of neck construction, which requires the use of a large, oversized neck block. Most of us believe this is a type of joint only suitable for economy guitars. It tends to be a bit less stable, and to many folks it looks a bit "cheap." On an inexpensive guitar, though, it's a good way to get the job done.

Always at the cutting edge of guitar production engineering, Taylor has come up with the most sophisticated bolted neck design ever. The end of the neck actually extends under the entire fingerboard, and the neck is bolted both from that surface and the end of the heel:

The neck angle can be changed with special shims to achieve minute neck angle adjustments, requiring no actual woodworking at all:

This style of construction allows for a neck joint that is remarkably easy to service. Because of the complexity of the joint, this kind of construction is feasible only with the most powerful of computer aided woodworking machinery.

So what? Is one style best?

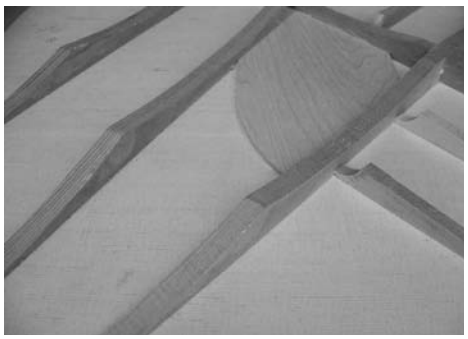
A few days ago I was speaking to Jeff Traugott, and individual luthier whose work I've admired for years. I asked him why he still uses a glued dovetail joint, considering that he takes it as his responsibility to maintain the neck angle for the original owners of his guitars. He said, "My guitars are really expensive, one-at-a-time custom instruments, and I figure I owe it to my customers to produce them with the highest quality traditional hand woodworking techniques. No, I don't think that a bolted neck would sound any different, or look inferior. It's a matter of my building style. Sure, it will be more work to reset the neck later on, but that's part of what I'm paid for when I sell the guitar in the first place."

I had an opportunity to take a tour of a small guitar factory, along with a group of interested guitar players. As our tour concluded, the owner of the factory asked the group if there were any questions he hadn't answered along the way. One of the group spoke up, asking, "When we walked by the neck fitting station, you mentioned that some of the crew was out to lunch, so we didn't get to see how the necks are installed. What type of joint do you use here?" "We use a tapered, glued dovetail joint because it is critical to achieve our tone," he replied. Another fellow suddenly shot up his hand, anxiously asking, "If that's the case, have you ever tried even a single example of another joint?" When the factory owner said they had never tried another joint, I felt I was hearing him defending their process of doing things the way they always had, rather than any reasoning based on observation or experimentation.

Over the years, I've had some opportunities to reset necks that are ordinarily thought of as nonremovable. In those cases, I've actually sawed the neck off, and converted a solid neck joint to a bolted one. Neither I nor the owners of the instruments have any tonal changes to report.

When you're thinking about the possibility that the neck joint contributes to or detracts from the instrument's tonal response, make sure you're on solid ground. For example, you can't draw the conclusion that Taylor's bolted neck joint contributes to their "bright" sound, while Martin's dovetail promotes "warmth" or "bottom end." Why? Because the neck joint is not nearly a significant as the design and construction of other parts of the guitar, especially the top.

Take a look at this Taylor guitar top bracing:



These are "scalloped" braces, and it's a dreadnought size guitar.

Now, look at Martin's scalloped dreadnought top:

The braces are much smaller in dimension, allowing the top to be more flexible. That, not the neck joint, is the significant reason that they sound different.

Each maker builds guitars with a different plan, and each uses only one kind of neck joint, so it's not possible to compare instruments directly and say whether the neck joint is the reason they sound different. Even the Martin factory, which at this time makes guitars with different neck joints, uses different bracing systems with each type of joint.

Which type of joint is best? Well, I'm a guitar mechanic, so I like the kind that come apart easily. In particular, I'm fond of the Collings style, because it looks the most traditional from the outside. As a musician, I'd rather judge a guitar on the basis of playing and hearing it. . .

Frank Ford has been a full-time professional luthier ever since he and his partner, Richard Johnston, founded Gryphon Stringed Instruments in 1969. Frank has written repair articles for a number of guitar and luthier publications, and currently serves on the board of directors of the Association of Stringed Instrument Artisans. He is a regular guitar instructor at the Roberto-Venn School of Luthiery in Phoenix, and at the American School of Lutherie in Healdsburg, CA.

Frank created and maintains FRETS.COM (www.frets.com), the largest acoustic instrument maintenance and repair reference site on the Internet.

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Kaufman's Corner

by Steve Kaufman

You Are My Sunshine

Hi friends and welcome back to my Korner of the Magazine. With so much hype about *Oh Brother* I thought I would throw one of the songs used. Norman played this tune beautifully and I have had numerous requests for it while on the workshop circuit.

The first version would be considered the straight version. A few hammer ons and strums. Make sure that you hold the chords of the measures down as much as possible. You will see that in the first version you can hold the chord that is over the measure and find the melody notes within the chord. When you leave the chord down or held during the measure it provides maximum sustain as well as makes it play easier.

The second version is more intricate. Keep in mind that all numbered beats in the measure are hit with down swings and all "+" notes are up swings. Count 1 2 3 4 and Play - Down Down Down Down !!! I've typed in the 1 + 2 + for measure 18 so you will see that the first note is in fact

played with an up swing. Why? Because it falls on an "+" beat. All eighth notes alternate this way and it makes life very simple when the right hand masters this and you won't have to think about it again. Watch out for all the arrows in the arrangement. I've put them there so you can check yourself. When you get to an arrow spot, check to see that your right hand hit the note the way the arrow says. If not, you messed up earlier and you really have to find where the problem is. Otherwise you will have mechanical failure and a musical crash is just around the bend.

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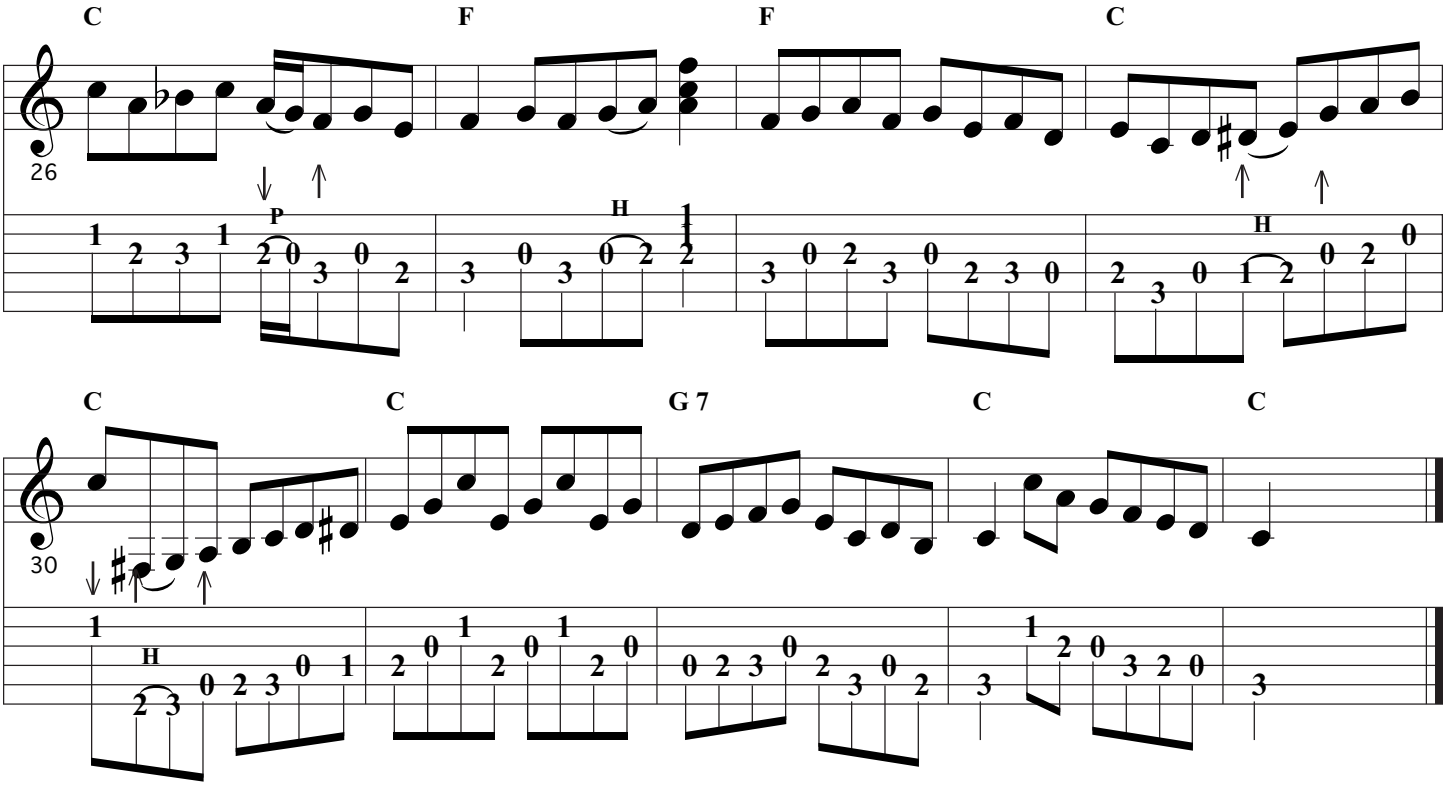
You Are My Sunshine

Arranged by Steve Kaufman

You Are My Sunshine (con't)



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Adventures in Acoustic Music:
Chopin for Flatpickers

by John Carlini

I love classical music, particularly classical piano music. One of my very favorite exercises is to transpose a piece or a fragment of a piece from the piano keyboard to the guitar fingerboard. It's my idea of a good time! (Are you still here?)

Why is this relevant to flatpicking guitar players? Simply because it opens up a universe of music composed by master practitioners. These were composers who spent their lives creating works that by today's "button pushing" standards can set us all back to a humiliating square one. It is staggering. You know the names: Bach, Beethoven, Mozart, Haydn, Chopin, etc. Many of them "became geniuses" years after their death. So it goes.

Anyway, here's a glimpse into the process of guitar-izing this great music. The example is a great piano masterwork by Frederick Chopin, "Fantasie-Impromptu". We're going to work on a 4-bar phrase. The piano music looks like this. (Ex. 1) Wow! I mean, I could talk about what is going on in this phrase for a week. In a nutshell, here it is. First, you're looking at a 4-sharp key signature. That means the key of E. However, the left hand part is a C sharp minor arpeggio. That is repeated 3 times in the space of the 2 measures. That's a pretty good indication that this piece is in the relative minor key of C sharp minor! In other words, C sharp minor is relative to E major in the same way that A minor is relative to C major. OK. We have a C sharp rhythm chord (or arpeggio) for 2 bars. Now let's look at the right hand.

Actually, to hear the melody, it's not too far removed from the sound of a fiddle tune. It's a melodic figure or theme. You might even think of it as a "lick"! And guess what? It's repeated in the second measure, so once you've learned it, you simply repeat it.

Tony Rice would say, "OK, man, what do we have so far?". Well, check it out. So far, we've distilled this brilliant phrase down to one repeated melodic "lick", and one minor chord. Now. How do we get it onto the fingerboard?

First of all, let's face it. C sharp minor is not a "key of choice" among the flatpicking guitar community. Let's transpose this thing into a more accessible key. How about E minor? Sound more user friendly? Take a look at Ex 2. All right, but we still have some problems. If you want to learn and practice this on your own, we have to make a few adjustments. Consider that the melodic phrase strongly defines the sound of E minor, so we really don't have to play that arpeggio. We could simply play an open 6th string E and let that note ring while we play the melody. Do that twice and you have it! You're flatpicking Chopin!! I've already discovered that the most comfortable place to play this is out of position VII and VIII.

So. We finally arrive at Ex 3. Here is the same fragment, on the fingerboard, in the key of E minor, with tab and a bit of suggested fingering! It shouldn't take too long to "get a handle" (Handel?) on this figure. Notice that I "doubled" the bass E on the 5th string 7th fret just to give it more definition.

After a while, you may "hear" some more modern implications in this phrase. Do you detect a bit of Django in there?! Maybe you could "turn" this phrase into something useful in a jamming situation. Imagine that. "Hey, where did you get that cool sounding lick?" "Oh, I got that from Chopin's 'Fantasie-Impromptu'!" How cool is that?!

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Additionally, Wyatt is shown improvisationally accompanying various instruments (banjo, fiddle, guitar, mandolin) and then analyzing what he has done to provide the rhythmic foundation behind each instrument. Also featured are guest appearances by: Rickie Simpkins on fiddle (Sally Goodin' and Dusty Miller) and mandolin (Big Country and I Wonder Where You Are Tonight), Sammy Shelor on banjo (Ground Speed and Whitewater), Kenny Smith on guitar (Goodbye, Liza Jane and Bill Cheathum) and Tony Rice (Waltz for Indira, Manzanita, and Devlin). Wyatt provides guitar accompaniment to each of these artists and then analyzes the techniques he has employed.

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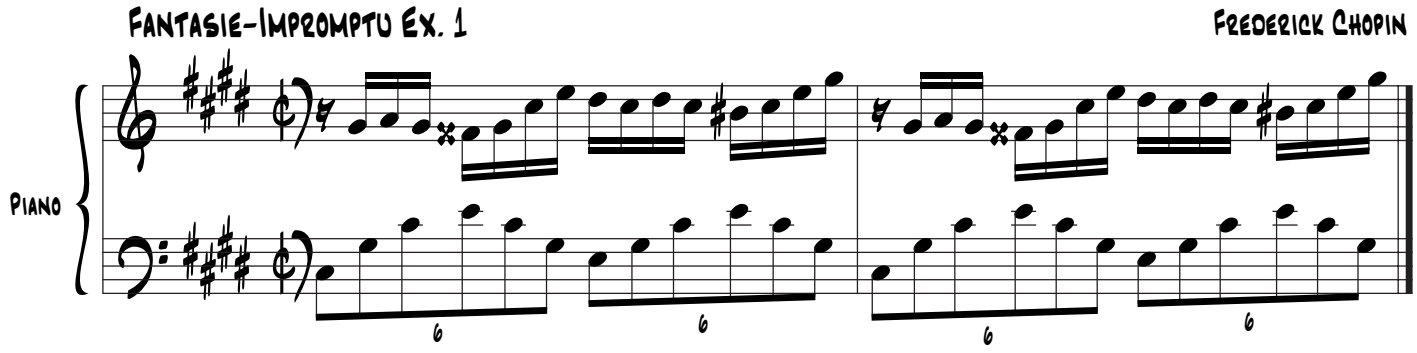

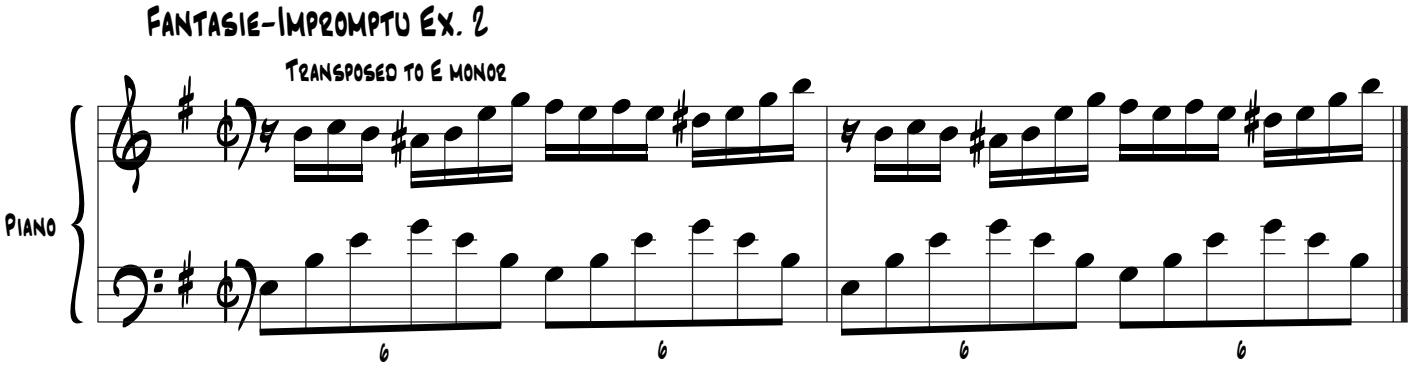

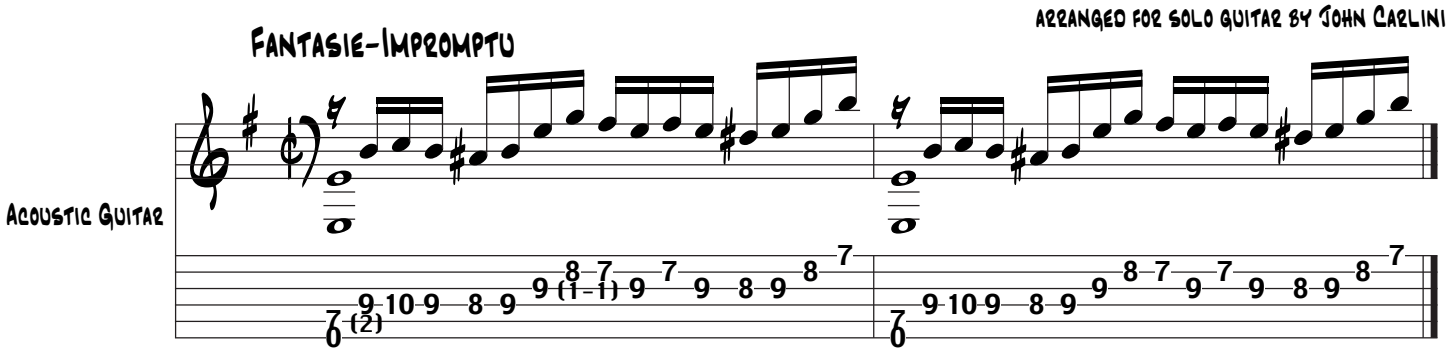

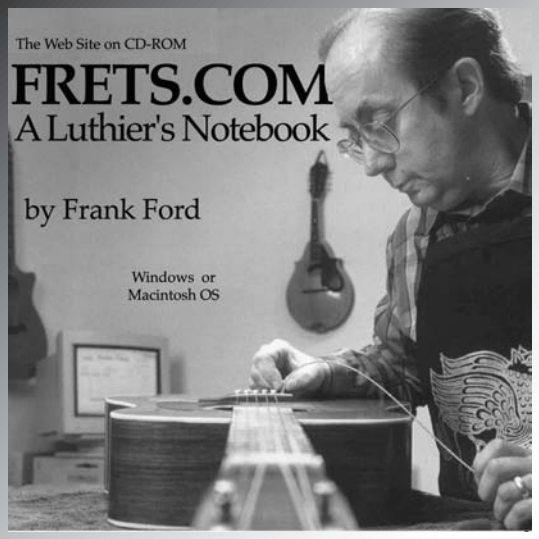

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Flatpick Profile:
Dan Kessinger

by Dan Miller

When I first contacted Dan Kessinger and told him that we wanted to feature him in *Flatpicking Guitar Magazine*, his initial response was, "Are you sure?" I've heard Dan compete for the past six years at the National Flatpicking Championships in Winfield, Kansas, and I've heard him jam with his brother Robin. I have no doubt that his talent is worthy of a feature in *Flatpicking Guitar Magazine* and I assured him that we did want to do the article. Humbly, Dan said, "I'm a little ashamed of how little I work at it. I practice less than anybody I know—and it shows. I've never taken any of it serious at all." I said, "For a guy who says he has never taken music seriously, you are one heck of a good picker." Dan explained, "Well, Robin is Mr. Focus on all this stuff and I am exactly the opposite. Robin was always trying to get me to play [music] and I was always playing football and doing what the other kids were doing." While Robin does cast a mighty big shadow, Dan Kessinger is a great picker in his own right.

Dan Kessinger started "playing with" his father's mandolin at the age of three. "My mom used to let me play Dad's mandolin." he explains. "I doubt he knew that that was going on. The funny thing is that I actually knew what I was playing, but nobody knew about it. I remember this as clear as a bell. I was hitting random notes on it and accidentally hit the first three notes to 'Waltz Over the Waves.' I recognized the tunes and hit the notes again. I'm sure Mom and Dad would have been surprised and pleased had they known that, but at three years old it didn't seem important enough to tell anybody. I just filed it away and thought, 'Well, I can do that.' " Dan then picked up the ukulele at the age of five, but he says that he didn't really start to learn to play music in earnest until he was thirteen and began working with the fiddle. At age fifteen he started playing the guitar.

Much of the motivation for Dan to learn how to play music was the encouragement he received from his older brother Robin, eight years his senior. Dan says, "Robin would lay out stuff for me to play while he was gone at work. Before he got ready to go to work in the morning he would show me something and say, 'I want you to work on this so that we can play it this afternoon.' So I would do that."

When asked why he wanted to start playing fiddle instead of the guitar like his brother, or the mandolin like his father, Dan said, "I was real young when Uncle Clark [legendary fiddler Clark Kessinger] was still alive, but I remember him playing. The fiddle has always grabbed me." Dan's learning process on fiddle—and then later on guitar—was to listen to a song until he "knew it in his head"' and then sit down to find it on his instrument. He says, "If I feel like I can sing it, I can play it." He says that he likes to play tunes in his own style, yet he always tries to maintain the integrity of the tune.

Having first been a fiddle player before taking up the guitar, I asked Dan if he approaches learning a tune on guitar the way he plays it on the fiddle. His initial answer to that question was, "Well, the guitar strings tend to be really hard on your bow." After the laughter died down, Dan said, "Actually Robin plays the guitar more like a fiddle player than any other guitar player that I have heard. For me the fiddle is the starting point, but then I pervert the fiddle melody to make it a guitar tune. I do this not necessarily because I want to, but

because I have to due to my limitations on the guitar. There are certain 'short-cuts' melodically that I make, and many guitar players make, due to technical limitations on the guitar. I might have to use a pull-off at some point because I am unable to get in an upstroke that would be closer to the melody, or I might play an open string that really isn't in the melody because it is easier than going for the exact melody note."

Dan does not want to be a guitar player who exactly copies what he does on the fiddle, but he feels that if he were technically able to play the fiddle tune's melody on the guitar like it is played on the fiddle, he would then have more options available for variations on the fiddle tune theme. He said, "To me the challenge is to vary it in a way that you want to, not in a way that you have to based on short-cuts or limitations. Robin's skill on the guitar allows him to be able to play the tune exactly like a fiddle player. Also his approach to the guitar and his timing are like that of a fiddle player, even more so that mine and I play the fiddle and Robin doesn't."

A family man and a minister at the Church of Christ in St. Mary's, West Virginia, Dan admits that the only time he makes the time to practice his music is just before the annual family trip to Winfield. He says his motivation there is two-fold, "I want to do well in the contest and I want to show off in jam sessions. Those are the only two things I worry about." Although Dan has played in, and won, numerous contests over the years, he says that these days he only plays two—the contest at Winfield and the Ohio state contest.

Dan plays out in public as a duo with his brother Robin about five times a year. Their father also joins them a couple of times a year and they perform as an old-time trio. Dan plays both fiddle and guitar when he is playing out with Robin but sticks mostly to fiddle when their father joins them. Over the years he has also performed with a banjo player, Rick Tincher, both in contests and in a bluegrass band, but he is not doing that today. To date Dan has made two records, one in 1990 and one in 1996. He did the first recording with Rick and Robin. The second recording included Steve Kaufman, Robin, Rick, and Dan's nephew, Robbie.

Since 1990 Dan has played a 1971 Mossman guitar. "This guitar only sounds good when you are playing it as hard as you can," he says. "I like to play hard—with this guitar the harder you hit it, the more it likes it. It has a big punchy sound. It has an undersized soundhole which gives it a focused sound and a swift decay. I like it because the notes don't run together. It is also old and beat up and ugly, which means that I can't hurt it."

Regarding his guitar technique, Dan says, "I don't do anything the way you are supposed to, I do it different than everybody else. I have a backwards pick angle. I started that when I was playing a lot with Rick on the banjo. I found that I could play harder and louder without having the strings pop and buzz."

When asked about other elements of his technique that he thought were unique, Dan said, "Honestly, everything. When I'm playing backup, I don't anchor anywhere. In fact, I wear off the skin on the back of my right hand knuckles. Which I'm certain isn't right. [laughs] I try to watch that anymore because it is kind of painful [more laughter]."

Although Dan has been a contest player and still plays a few contests every year, he says that one downside of contest playing is that some players can become so concerned with playing the notes technically that they forget to play music. Dan says, "Music is more than a series of notes. It is the timing as much as the notes. The performer needs to feel the music. It needs to be alive. There is a difference between a technician and a musician. Sometimes the difference is subtle and the person doesn't realize it."

Although the Kessingers still enter contests, for them it is all about having fun. For me the best part of watching the contest at Winfield is watching Dan back-up Robin and Robin back-up Dan. It has become a part of the Winfield experience. For many seasoned Winfield veterans it would not be Winfield without the jam sessions at the Kessinger campsite. Whenever I hear the contest heavy-hitters talking to each other during the day, the conversation usually ends with, "Are you going over to the Kessinger's tonight?" The answer is inevitably affirmative and is followed by, "We'll see you there." If you are jamming with the Kessingers, you are always going to have a great time.

On the following page we have transcribed Dan's arrangement of "Flight of the Bumblebee."

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Flight of the Bumblebee

Arranged by Dan Kessinger
Transcribed by Brad Davis

Flight of the Bumblebee (con't)

When is a "Wedgie" a Good Thing?

by Mike Maddox

Luthier Randy Lucas

As a member in good standing of the flatpicking guitar community, I know there are a number of persistent questions that have been the topics of long-standing discussions among our members. These include:

- Is rosewood or mahogany the "best" tone wood?
- Are three-piece backs more or less desirable than two-piece backs?
- Are pre-war Martins really the holy grail of flatpicking guitars?
- Why would I want to have a "wedgie"?

Certainly, the online contingent of flatpickers has all but exhausted the range of opinions regarding these matters (well, except for that "wedgie" thing).

To answer these burning questions, I visited well-known luthier Randy Lucas at his shop near Columbus, Indiana. During a wide-ranging interview that consumed nearly four hours (including the 3-gravy lunch at Bob Evans), Randy filled me in on his background, his product line, and his thoughts regarding where things might be heading in the world of flattop guitars. Rather than presenting a "question and answer" account of our conversation, this article is a distillation of the most salient information from that interview.

Beginnings

Randy's path to the top of luthiery world began in 1988, when repairing and restoring vintage guitars led him to recreate some of the Martin guitar models from the golden era of the 1930s. Working as a repair person allowed him the opportunity to take apart, measure, sketch, and otherwise absorb every detail of many types of instruments, including the pre-war Martin guitars that are so highly regarded.

With a natural curiosity regarding the components that made one guitar sound different or better than another, Randy made enough detailed notes and drawings to literally fill entire books. He immersed himself in the luthiery fraternity—picking up information regarding wood, woodworking methods, and guitar construction from other luthiers and from every publication he could find. This experience provided the reference point from which to launch his building career.

Randy's experimentation with vintage Martin designs evolved into his most well-known instrument—the Kenny Smith (KS) Model guitar. Randy credits his association with Kenny and the wide acclaim of the KS Model guitar, as the most significant factors in his rise to notoriety within the flatpicking and luthiery community. Although he no longer offers the KS Model in his product line, he is still completing these instruments for those who had previously placed orders.

It would be easy to believe that the KS Model and other dreadnaught-style guitars would be a great niche for any luthier. However, Randy is very clear in his perspective that he has absolutely no desire to build only great reproductions of the pre-war dreadnaught-style guitars. Instead, his explicit goal is to advance the state of the guitar design and building

art. His quest for new and different guitar designs is rooted in the belief that there is ample room for the guitar to grow—both in its fundamental ability to produce sound and its ability to relate to the musicians who play it.

To a significant degree, Randy—along with a few other individuals—has already dramatically improved the level of expectation regarding guitar construction. He is generally acknowledged to be among an elite group of luthiers whose craftsmanship is superior. His name is usually mentioned in the same sentence as Bill Collings, Lynn Dudenbostel, and Marty Lanham as a craftsman producing instruments with impeccable fit and finish.

Even among the notoriously anal-retentive (and I use that term with Randy's blessing) luthier community, Randy's work is perceived as a cut above. Randy accepts these assessments with a good deal of humility. He acknowledges that his work is subject to the dictates of the "helpless perfectionist" that forms the basis of his personality. He compares himself to any artist who is striving to produce the best possible embodiment of his craft.

That Guitar is HOW MUCH? This line of discussion provided an opportunity for Randy to explain how his quest for perfection relates directly to the price of his instruments. He acknowledged that he has heard comments regarding what some perceive as the relatively high price of his guitars. He has, in fact, raised his prices over the past few years. He reacts with consternation when people assume that his prices reflect an inflated ego or elitism related to his much-in-demand instruments. In fact, these prices reflect two facts of life in the luthiery business.

First, independent luthiers can produce only a certain number of instruments each year. Randy acknowledges with an "I'm ashamed to admit it, but…" comment that he is the least efficient luthier he knows. His basic guitar model requires about 90 hours of labor to build. For comparison, large (mass production) builders typically take less than 10 hours to build an instrument. His construction techniques involve a great deal of hand work and serial operation.

The devil, as they say, is in the details. Selecting materials, voicing (or tap tuning) the top, using hide glue to construct the body, fitting the dovetail neck joint, hand radiusing the corners of the fingerboard, and individually rounding the ends of each fret are among these time-consuming details. Wringing that extra 0.5% of construction perfection takes an inordinate amount of time. Currently, Randy builds only about 15 guitars a year. His goal is to build 30 instruments a year.

In an attempt to address some of the less efficient steps in his production process, Randy is in the middle of creating and re-designing many of his jigs and fixtures. I saw a detailed CAD drawing he made of a bending fixture that will allow him to produce bent sides with a much higher degree of repeatability and a much lower level of grain damage than with his current bending technique. Where automated shaping is appropriate (rough neck blanks, for example), Randy is getting ready to employ computer-based milling equipment. To ensure the best tone from each instrument, he draws the line where hand work is still needed, especially when it comes to voicing and bracing the top. Although this process redesign is time-consuming, Randy is betting that the eventual payback in efficiency and consistency will more than offset the resources he's devoting to it.

The second biggest cost factor for Randy—really for any luthier—is finding, purchasing, cutting, grading, and storing wood species that are, in many cases, all but extinct. Randy makes 4-5 extended trips a year to find and buy wood. Knowing that certain types of wood will not be available within a few years means that Randy and other builders must try to balance the cost of acquiring and maintaining sufficient inventory with the projected client demand for various wood species. Although wood is the fundamental ingredient in guitars, none of the activities related to acquiring and storing wood is independently subsidized. In other words, these costs have to be recovered in the price of the instruments sold.

Ergonomics

You might not think about it in these terms, but playing a steel string, acoustic guitar can be, and often is, a serious health threat. The awkward arm and body posture, the force required to hold down the strings, the repetitive nature of both left and right hand actions, and the often tense and static nature of holding a particular playing position all combine to present a significant threat of repetitive motion injuries. These injuries, which tend to result from an accumulation of many small stresses (rather than a single traumatic event), include both joint and soft-tissue inflammation, as well as nerve compression and irritation.

For those who might not know, I should confess at this point that my formal education and much of my professional life has revolved around the science of ergonomics and human factors. The first time I had an opportunity to spend an hour or two with Randy, which occurred at the Merle Watson Memorial Music Festival (Merlefest) in 1999, we found that we had a mutual interest in this topic. I had been interested in the early ergonomic work of William Cumpiano, which had been reported in *Acoustic Guitar Magazine*. Bill had designed a guitar with a shallow, wedge-shaped body for a musician who had suffered a chronic shoulder injury caused by playing a standard dreadnaught.

When Randy and I met at Merlefest, we talked about possible changes that might be made so steel-string guitars would be more comfortable and less dangerous to play. I mentioned to Randy during our interview that I was impressed by our Merlefest conversation—to find that a well-known luthier was so interested in ergonomics. Randy's interest in ergonomics, though he might not have known it by that name at the time, began when he was studying classical guitar in college. Hours of practice holding a guitar with his forearm resting on a sharp guitar edge caused him to start his search for what he knew must be a better way to design and build these instruments.

When Randy built guitar number four (a jumbo), he used a shallow body depth in an effort to reduce the arm extension required to play it. This was his first stab at changing the design of a guitar to accommodate those who would play it. In the early 1990s, during an ASIA (Association of Stringed Instrument Artisans) symposium, Randy met Grit Laskin and Bill Cumpiano. During a panel session, they answered questions and described their ideas about ergonomic guitar features. It was just before this time that Bill Cumpiano had designed and built a wedge-bodied guitar. Grit's approach included an arm cutout along the top edge of the lower bout. Randy liked both approaches, but he preferred Cumpiano's design, since the appearance of the front of the guitar was not altered.

Our Merlefest discussion included the advantages of using a wedge-shaped body, as well as other possible ergonomic features, such as rounded body and fretboard edges, different neck profiles, etc. Of

these possibilities, the wedge-shaped body provides probably the biggest immediate return in terms of reduced injuries. Playing a typical acoustic guitar shape requires the musician to drape his or her picking arm over the top of the instrument. This causes two things to happen—both bad from an ergonomic perspective.

First, the picking arm must be held out away from the player's body. Technically, this is called "abduction" and, like all static, non-neutral postures, can lead to joint and soft tissue problems. Second, since we can't really suspend our arm in mid-air (at least for any length of time), part of the weight of the picking arm is usually resting against the top edge of the lower bout of the guitar. The sharp edge where the top of the guitar meets the side can reduce blood flow in the lower arm and can, in fact, directly impinge on the nerves running on the body side of the upper arm.

Varying the depth of the guitar, with a shallower bass bout and deeper treble bout, allows the top to be held at a slight angle to the body. In the case of Randy's version of the wedge design, the depth of the bass bout varies from 3/4 of an inch to 1 inch shallower than the treble side of the guitar. Over a 15 inch distance (the approximate width of a dreadnaught guitar lower bout), the change in body depth results in an angle of about 4 degrees. This angle allows the relationship of the player's arm and the top of the guitar to approach parallel, reducing the angle of arm abduction and the amount of sharp contact between guitar edge and soft tissue. Cutting through the technical jargon, wedge-bodied guitars feel more comfortable to hold and play—and they reduce the probability of joint and soft-tissue injuries.

In the domain of ergonomics, small changes can make a big difference. On all his guitars, Randy rounds the edges of the fingerboard by hand sanding the sharp transition between the top and sides. Instead of a sharp edge, Randy's fingerboards contain a refined, convex shape. He also hand radiuses the ends of each fret, so they present a smooth shape over which the player's fingers can slide. These seemingly small con-struction details contribute to an package of ergonomic improvements that make for much more comfortable (and inherently safer) playing.

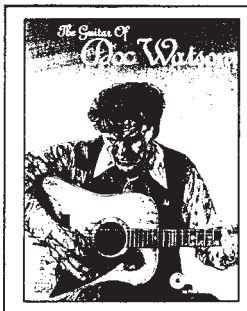
The Wedgie

The ostensible purpose of my interview with Randy was to discuss his new LD18/3 LSH Wedge guitar. When I first saw the prototype for this guitar (at Steve Kaufman's Flatpicking Guitar Camp in 2001), I jokingly named it the "wedgie". Much to Randy's chagrin, I'm sure, that name stuck. It's just easier to say "wedgie" than "LD18/3 LSH". Unfortunately, it is misleading to call the LD18/3 the "wedgie," since Randy makes the wedge-shaped body available on any instrument he builds. In fact, I've got a new Lucas SJ model ordered and it will also have a wedge-shaped body. The complete specifications for the LD18/3 LSH are given below.

- AA Grade Adirondack/Red Spruce top
- Scalloped, 1" advanced, Red Spruce bracing
- 1930's-style herringbone trim
- Large soundhole
- Vintage-style Brazilian rosewood bridge with 2 5/16" pin spacing
- 1930s-style tortoise-style pickguard
- Ebony fingerboard with no front-facing position dots
- 25.4 inch scale
- Tortoise-style body binding, end graft, and heel cap
- Aged mahogany sides
- Three-piece back with aged Mahogany outer panels and old-growth
- Brazilian rosewood center panel
- Neck is 1 3/4" at the nut, 2 1/4" at the 12th fret. Slim profile with diamond volute.
- Waverly tuners with tinted ivoroid buttons
- Brazilian Rosewood peghead veneer with torch-style inlay—bound with tortoise-style edging and black/white purfling
- Fossil ivory nut with intonated bone saddle
- Wedge body depth for ergonomic playing benefits
- Hide glue body construction
- Nitrocellulose gloss finish
- Geib-style five-ply hardshell case
- Price $5,000

Randy's goal with the LD 18/3 LSH was to create a flatpicking guitar that captures the sound of the prewar guitars and re-packages it in an ergonomically correct body. While the wedge body is certainly an innovation, the LD18/3 is really a ground-breaking instrument for other reasons, as well. As the designation implies, its heritage is the 1930s vintage D-18 that also formed the basis for Randy's KS model. Its body outline and dimensions are very much consistent with vintage D-18s, as is the use of hide glue in its construction and the use of Adirondack (Red) spruce as the top material, advanced X-bracing, herringbone trim (from D-28s of that era), Brazilian Rosewood bridge, and tortoise (plastic) pickguard. Also, of course, the sides and part of the back are made of aged mahogany.

Beyond these features, which owe their heritage to pre-war Martin dreadnaughts, other elements of the LD 18/3 LSH are derived from Randy's experimentation with improvements to the original design, his desire to be a better steward of the environment, and his determination to



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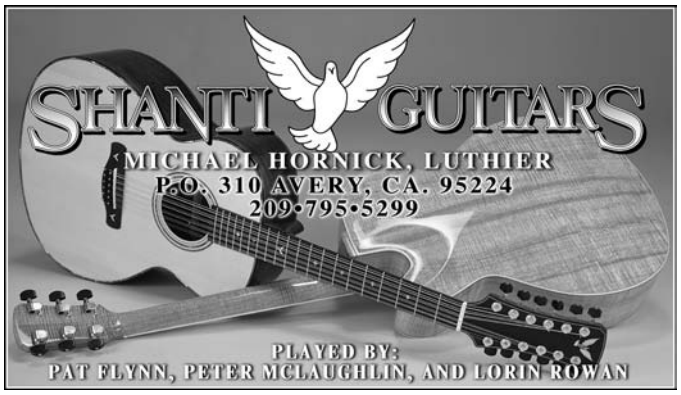

The Lucas LD18/3 LSH

prove that guitars with three-piece backs have gotten a bad rap. The most visible non-vintage details are the large sound hole and the use of a fossil nut. I asked Randy specifically why he uses fossil nuts and bone saddles. He told me he believes fossil, especially the harder enamel layer he uses, allows wound strings to slide more easily in the nut grooves than bone, while maintaining the mass required to transmit vibration efficiently. He uses unbleached bone as the saddle material. Fossil saddles can sometimes impart a glassy, bright sound and Randy thought the LD 18/3 LSH was already bright enough.

The use of a three-piece back accomplishes several objectives. First and foremost, Randy decided this would be a good way to combine the best tone characteristics of rosewood and mahogany. Most luthiers acknowledge that the soundboard material determines most of the volume and overall tone of a guitar. However, the materials in the back and, to a lesser extent, the sides contribute to the "color" of an instrument's sound. What better way to combine the contributions of rosewood and mahogany than to actually use these woods in the back?

Martin pioneered the use of three-piece backs in 1965 with the D-35 (and the subsequent HD-35). These guitars evoke strong feelings from many in the acoustic community. I should admit here that I still own the HD-35 I bought over 12 years ago and I very much like it. However, a significant number of knowledgeable people claim the 35s simply don't have the sound for lead guitar work. Also of historical note is the fact that one of the Martin "special issue" guitars in 1991 was the D-3-18, which was essentially a D-18 with a three-piece mahogany back and several vintage appointments.

One of Randy's motivations in designing and building the LD 18/3 LSH was to demonstrate that three-piece backs are no less desirable, sound-wise, than two-piece backs. In his analysis of D-35s, Randy discovered that Martin not only introduced three-piece (rosewood) backs in this model, but also significantly changed the top bracing. In the D-35, Martin used the 000 model X braces, which are shorter and narrower than the standard "D" X braces. He attributes the distinctive, bassier, sound of D-35s to these bracing changes and not the three-piece back. In the LD 18/3 LSH, Randy has provided a top bracing design that he feels will deliver a balanced, clear sound, while still providing that bass "oomph" that dreadnaught players love.

The third reason Randy chose to give this model a three-piece back is the same reason that is attributed to Martin for introducing the D-35: to use pieces of Brazilian rosewood that were too small to make two-piece backs. As CITES-regulated tone wood becomes more and more scarce, it will become increasingly important to use as much of the existing material as possible. Like all builders, Randy has many small pieces of material that are either too small to form half a guitar back or that have a small defect (that can be removed at the expense of some wood area). Using these smaller pieces of wood is an economic issue for builders and an environmental issue for all of us who make, buy, and sell instruments made from these materials.

I discovered during our interview, though this really comes as no great surprise, that Randy is passionate about finding and using great wood—and about preserving the sources of wood through careful forest management, very selective cutting and salvage, and designing instruments to make the most efficient use of the wood that is available. The LD 18/3 LSH embodies this philosophy in a way that lets the musician, wood freak, visual artist, and environmentalist in all of us win. Think of it as a "no guilt" way to enjoy a great guitar.

Looking Toward the Future

Randy Lucas is a thinker as well as a builder. This is trait that is probably shared by all great artists and craftspeople. How can I do this better? How can I make these guitars respond more effectively to the person playing them? What materials am I overlooking that might really make a quantum leap in sound (or use of materials, or construction efficiency, or design, etc.)?

Randy's ideas for the future form a pretty long list. They include the practice of milling fret slots in fingerboard blanks so they do not extend all the way to the edges. This technique provides all the advantages of bound fingerboards without requiring any edge binding. On all mass-produced guitars with unbound fingerboards, frets

are installed so the ends of the fret tangs overhang the edges of the fingerboard. These ends are then filed so they are flush with the side of the fingerboard. After the guitar is finished, the fingerboard shrinks (but the frets don't), leaving chipped lacquer on the side of the fingerboard. In severe cases, the fret ends actually overhang the fingerboard enough to interfere with sliding the fretting hand up and down the neck. As a great industrial designer once said "All great design ideas seem obvious in retrospect."

In addition to such incremental improvements, Randy has two patent applications pending. These relate to the use of layered wood veneers in ways that mimic, and in many ways improve upon, the properties of solid wood. For now, this feature will be limited to one or two models. He is also considering how the use of composite reinforcing might allow tops to be built with very few braces and with as yet unexplored tonal properties.

As our conversation was winding down, I asked Randy what sorts of things he sees himself doing in the future. He mentioned that, although he is best known for his steel string guitars, his formal musical training and first love was the classical guitar. He wants to explore ways to make the classical guitar much more responsive. He's pondering whether different types of string compositions might be the path to the better classical guitar. You'll recall that Randy actually started his luthiery path while hanging around with John Monteleone when John was primarily building mandolins. Randy told me that he'd love to start building mandolins and archtop guitars using the unique peghead outline he developed for his new SJ model guitar.

For those who might be concerned that Randy is stepping away from his "standard" 1930s-era models, rest assured that he is not. However, in an effort to direct more of his efforts to his later models, Randy is limiting the production of his mahogany (base price) models to three orders per year.

We ended the interview with a few thoughts from Randy regarding "things he'd really like readers to know." What Randy said, which I've paraphrased below, seems to apply equally well to all independent luthiers—and maybe to one's general perspective on all things musical. Randy's advice: Try more than one example of a luthier's work before passing judgment on whether you like or dislike it. Heck, try more than one model from the same luthier.

Those of us who inhabit the Internet have seen a number of examples of people proclaiming that they played a particular guitar from builder "X" and either loved it or hated it. Randy rightly points out that these public proclamations have an effect that might far exceed the author's intention—or the reality of why and how that particular instrument was designed.

As an example, Randy cited his own KS model. He said that he designed the action on this guitar model so a player of Kenny's caliber could depend on the strings popping back under the pick quickly. This gives the guitar, or at least early versions of it, a "stiff" feel. Other Lucas models have a completely different feel. Not to mention the fact that as a custom builder, Randy can provide whatever characteristics a particular player might want, in terms of neck shape and tonal characteristics.

So how do I sum up my visit with Randy Lucas? I already knew Randy was a nice guy. Like most of you, I also knew Randy's reputation as a luthier. I had played several of his guitars. None of this information came as a revelation. I suppose what struck me after spending almost four hours talking with Randy is that, like most other "hot" talents, he's been laboring in the trenches for years—perfecting his craft and thinking about how he can advance the state of the art.

The new ergonomic features Randy offers on his guitars elegantly demonstrates that ergonomics does not necessarily translate into a weird looking instrument. When Randy showed the prototype of his SJ model (with the wedge body) to some musician friends, their first reaction when they opened the case was "Wow! It's not a Frankenstein guitar."

His craft is difficult and demanding. Earning a living building guitars is a daunting proposition and Randy struggles with this aspect of his chosen craft. Above all, Randy is a person who loves what he does and is driven to perfection. The artifacts he builds bring pleasure to a great number of people and they will survive as testaments to his craftsmanship for decades—perhaps centuries. We should all be so lucky.

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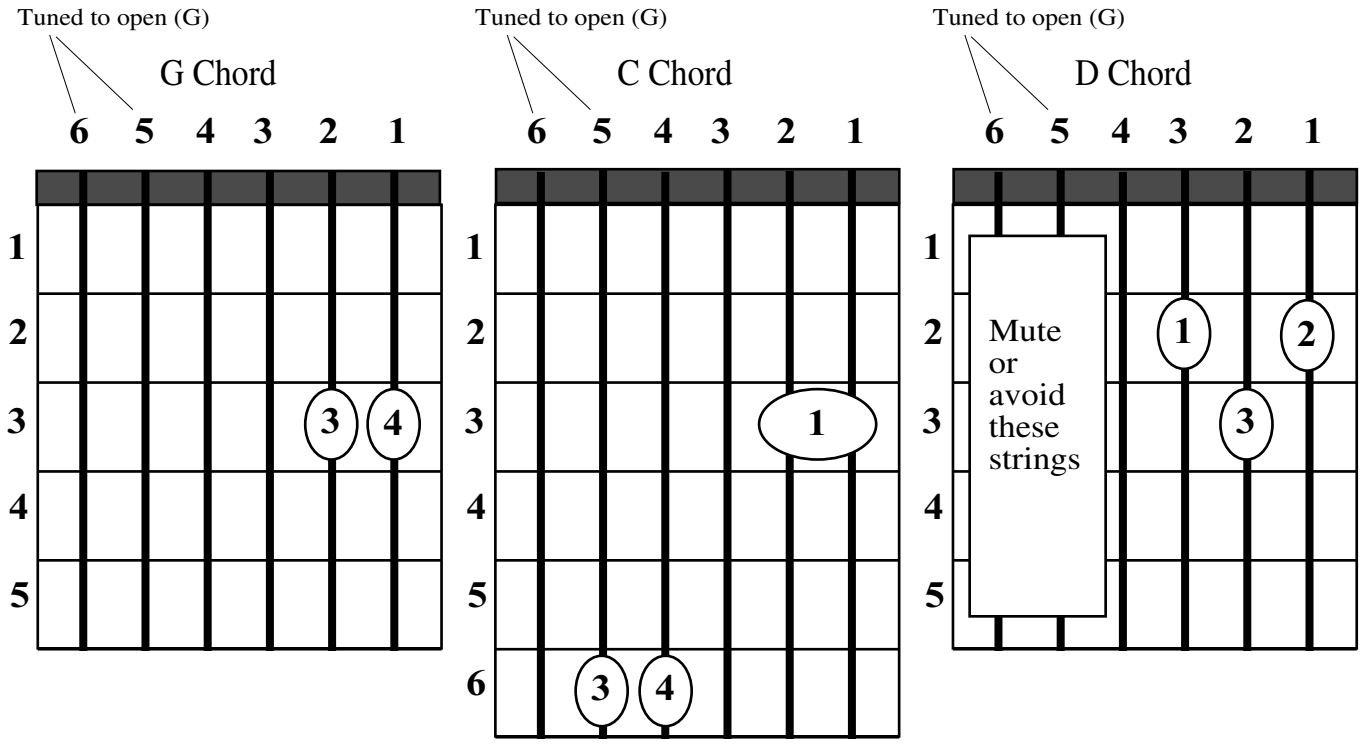
NASHVILLE FLATTOP

By Brad Davis

CHANGING THE TUNING

A lot of times you may find yourself bored with songs you know. You lay down your flattop for several days and sometimes pick it up to find there is a spark of freshness and then other times nothing. The longer we conduct ourselves as pickers the more frequent boredom will sneak in. I find that I often rehash licks and phrases and while my mind tells me I'm bored, my heart is yelling don't stop! When you reach this juncture you may want to try something new. Change the standard tuning on your guitar. Get out of the box. Yes, you can fall off into crazy land if your not careful. Falling off is no problem, but getting stuck there is. I change my tuning from standard to whatever my imagination tells me to at that time. It raises the fun factor greatly! Diagramed below are a few chords using an open (G) tuning. Take the 6th string up to a (G) note and the 5th string down to a (G) and leave all the others alone. Don't panic, the sixth string can hold this extra tension for a good while. The reason these chords are different is because the tuning mandates it! Try them out on any traditional vocal or instrumental. If the song you are playing has chords that are not illustrated below, sit down with your ears and figure them out. There are possibilities for all chords, some better than others. Don't be afraid to crash and burn. Have fun and enjoy!

Chords used with the open (G) tuning



Break Time

by Chris Jones

Volume and Dynamics

The subject of volume and dynamics in playing breaks to songs is something I can't really write tab for. I realize that some people can write tab for anything, even bread recipes and fishing tips, but I'm afraid I haven't attained that tab-writing skill level. We're not dealing here with note choice or timing, but rather with how those notes are played and how the strings are attacked.

Is there such a thing as too much volume in flatpicking guitar? Can you be too quiet a player? The answers are "yes" and "yes," respectively. Dealing with the first question, we all know that we need to be able to be heard and to deliver full tone, particularly in a bluegrass band setting, but there is a point of diminishing tone return. If you play with too much volume, the sound of the instrument can actually be drowned out by the sound of your own pick whomping down on your traumatized strings. To help us maximize our volume without getting this effect, we use heavier picks (which reduce pick noise) and strings than folk players do. There are still limits, however.

Playing too loud is most commonly the result of trying to be heard in a band situation in which the other instruments are not varying their backup dynamics based on who's playing lead. Whether it's lead guitar, fiddle, or a screaming tenor singer, they're thrashing away at the same volume level, with the overriding concern being to be heard at the other end of the festival grounds 3 miles away.

Of course you need to be able to be heard clearly over your accompaniment, but only 50 percent of that is your responsibility. The rest is up to the other musicians. Try to stress to them that they should be able to hear your break themselves, and if they can't, to back down until they can. Listening is the most important principal in dynamic playing. This is a difficult concept for some pickers, so try be firm but patient (I don't recommend the electric shock-collar system one guitar player in South Carolina tried with his other band members).

It's worth noting that this situation can arise even when there are only two guitars playing, so keep an eye on this in your own rhythm playing. Remember that your rhythm must always go hand-in-hand with listening to the person playing lead at the time.

As for holding up your end of the volume responsibility, it's definitely something to be taken seriously. Tone suffers just as much at the low end of the dynamic scale. Are you finding that you can never be heard over any level of backup? Are you difficult to mike? Are you starting to feel that you're also invisible (an extreme case)? This involves right hand technique issues that I won't go into right now, but this should be given priority in your practicing, above licks and speed, if you're having this trouble.

Some guitarists find they can play at an adequate volume on slower tunes, but quiet down on the faster numbers. For this, I'd recommend taking those fast tunes and slowing them down, working gradually back up with a metronome, being sure to maintain your volume.

Having said this, it's still important for rhythm players, whether it be you or someone else, to back down until the lead break is audible, even if you feel like you're practically "air-playing." If the lead player has a problem with his/her volume level, it's something to be worked on, but it's not something that's going to be resolved during the next 35 seconds. In the meantime, the break has to be heard somehow. Remember, the silent guitar break with pumping banjo, guitar and/or mandolin backup only gives the audience that feeling of listening to a stereo with one channel out. If they wanted that, they could just listen to music in my car.

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The Solo Flatpicker

by Dan Crary

The Loneliness of the Solo Flatpicker

I think I know who you are, you solo players. You came along as a new phenomenon in flatpicking: a whole generation of players who flatpick the acoustic guitar, but are not in bands. Fifteen years ago it was different; if you conducted a flatpicking workshop, people who showed were in bands. They were playing bluegrass, and they wanted to be bad, really baaaad. Nothing wrong with that, of course, and many of our colleagues of the flatpicking persuasion are still your basic bluegrass player, at home in jam sessions and full band concerts.

But today there's a new breed. You've come along in the last decade and a half, and you play, yes, solo. Someone should write a book: *The Loneliness of the Solo Flatpicker*. Come to think of it, maybe I will, but not today. Our job today is to focus on the special needs and challenges of flatpicking the guitar solo, and give you some ideas about how to do that and be more effective at it. And as you already know, no doubt, the challenges are different. Not necessarily more or less than those of the band players, but also not the same as….

Up there in front of an audience by yourself with one flatpick, you can be forgiven if you wish you'd become a fingerpicker, just to be able to make the full, rich, articulated and diverse music fingerpickers can make using all those fingers. It's a standard joke… flatpickers have psychological problems dealing with the disparity. Fingerpickers can pick with four or five fingers, but we have only one pick. In fact we've been showing up in psychoanalytic case studies with our problem… the therapists call it "plectrum envy." Well, it's a lame joke, but the problem is real: can you make full, rich, fully articulated and diverse music with only one pick? Be of good cheer my friends, the answer is yes, you can. Are we doing it now? No, we're not. But this column is specifically for you solo players, to help get you there.

Based on my years of conducting guitar workshops for Taylor guitar dealers and festival promoters, I've concluded several things about us solo players. First, we do a lot of song accompaniment; we're singer-songwriters, performers in churches and non-profit organizations, we sing and play for our kids, and some of us play gigs professionally and semi-pro. But secondly, many of us would like to be playing solos and haven't figured how to do it without the bottom dropping out, like "Bluegrass minus four" or something. Another interesting phenomenon is that many more women are flatpicking today; there are some great female pro flatpickers, but also a lot more of the solo players who are women, and it's refreshing to see that our approach to the guitar isn't just a hairy-armed guy thing. Flatpicking as an exercise in "male bonding" (yuck) leaves a lot to be desired.

And my observation on most of the folks in the category above is that they haven't arrived at where they want to be. Satisfying solo flatpicking is elusive, but when it starts to happen, it's a great experience. The flat pick is capable of unique and powerful music, and you don't have to be Doc Watson to make it happen (it would help, but it's not required).

In today's column, accompaniment. I'm sorry to say this, but if we're going to improve, we need to face the problems, including the not-very-fun ones. One problem is that most flatpicking rhythm or backup playing is really awful. Later we'll deal with more fun, sexier stuff for the guitar, but today let's work on the basics. If you see this through with me, I think you'll be shocked at how much more effective your playing will be. People won't applaud spontaneously for better backup, but they will notice you at a different level, such as the one where they decide to book you another time, because your playing was crisp and precise.

On the accompanying CD I attempt to play some of the common rhythm licks we hear in solo flatpicking today. Be careful, it's stomach-churningly bad, and not everyone's heart can stand anything that ugly. Then, I'll try to play the following examples. So let's analyze the following tabs, as we actually look at the basic rhythm lick, and listen to it played precisely. But don't be put off by the familiar… as tab, it looks like what you learned in lesson three when you were a kid. But in fact it's what most of us failed to learn, and it makes a huge difference to clean up the mess.

Example I is the basic "church-lick" flatpicking rhythm lick. Try playing it exactly as it's written. That means the bass note is one note, played precisely with a tighter grip on the pick. Then the strum is three strings only, with the pick looser, but the strum played as carefully as the bass note.

Then in Ex. II, the first variation, in which we all do the familiar thing of a quick up- stroke after the strum. But again, try it not like you always played it after a few beers or whatever, but like you want it to sound like if you ever played it for God. Come to think of it, maybe we're already doing that, and we ought to show it more respect.

In III we play an extra little note after the bass note, but it's on the third string, and each little move should stand out in stark precision. It's a variation you'd only do a couple of times, maybe, in the middle of a piece, but when you go to it, it will sound like a nice variation that flavors the music with something savory, and then moves on to something else.

In IV we combine II and III for a very pretty little accompaniment lick that will sound beautiful at a moderate tempo, especially if it's played right. Watch picking direction on all these, especially this one.

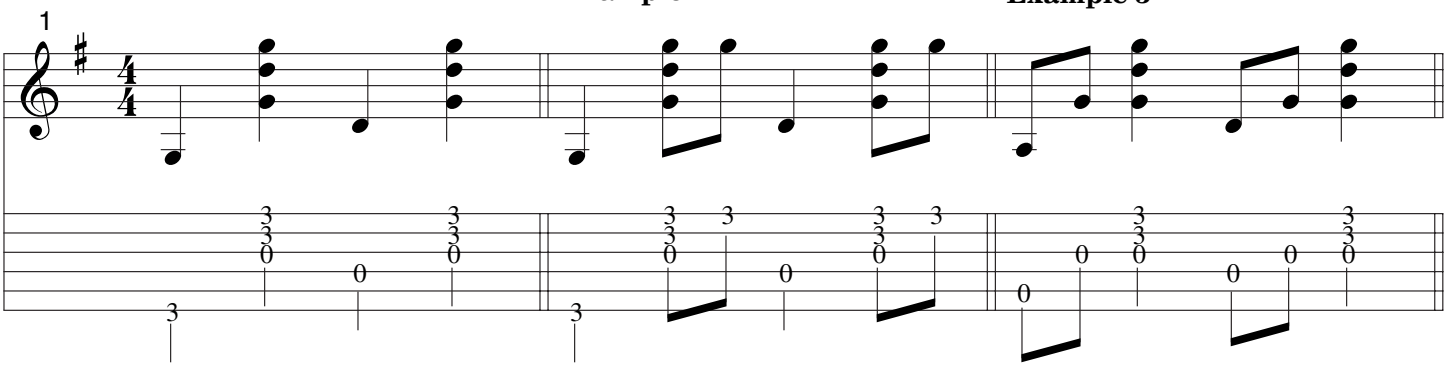
In V we substitute an arpeggio for the first bass note; notice how it sounds on the CD: the arpeggio can be either up or down, and it makes a nice little emphasis in the middle of a potentially dull run of one "bump-chick" after another.

Lastly, a two-measure calypso-like chord lick that works when you emphasize the One-two-three-FOUR-one-two-THREE-four. Or Count it as eight: One-two-three-FOUR-five-six-SEVEN-eight, and so on. Do it sparingly and get off of it, but if you practice it under the phrase of a song and succeed at playing it while keeping the song straight it's a nice little piece of ammunition.

The idea is to actually master the basic lick, get it perfect, sweat this detail, then add the variations sparingly, but keep the precision of the basic lick in there to make it flow.

Thanks for joining us. Please have a look at my website: *www.dancrary.com*. Next time, "Between the lines" in G, and what to do between phrases of a song to "fill" the extra measures. Your friends and audiences will be impressed. They'll say stuff like, "I didn't know you could play like that." And you can say stuff like, "Aw, nothin' to it." It'll be fun, I promise.

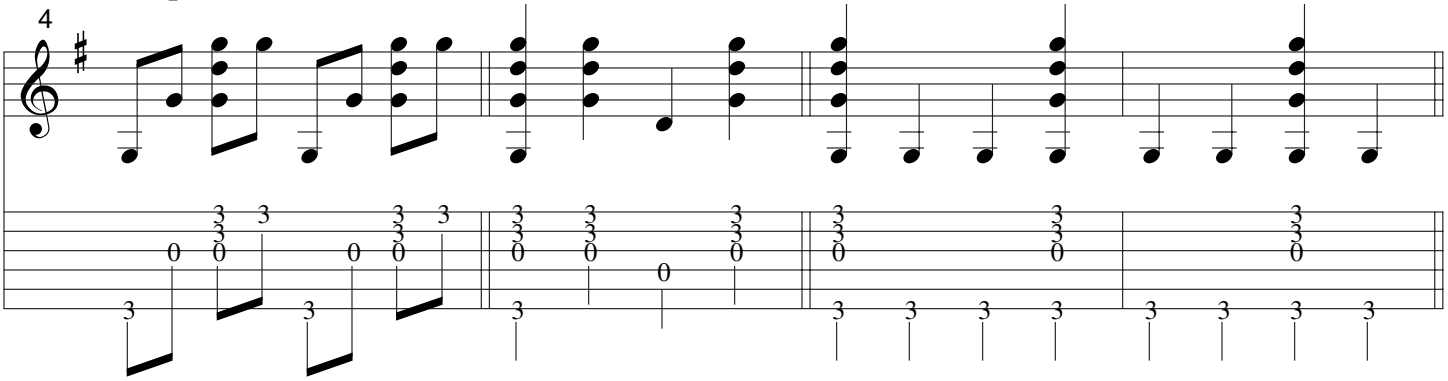
Example 1



Example 2

Example 3

Example 4



Example 5

Example 6

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JAM TUNES

"Home Sweet Home" by Dan Miller

Lately, we've been getting a lot of requests from beginning-level students who want us to include some more beginning-level solos to simple songs in the magazine. Since we did not get a "Jam Tunes" article submitted for this issue, I thought that I would take the opportunity to fulfill the requests from beginning level readers and provide a good tune for beginners to tackle, "Home Sweet Home."

What I have provided here is a very straight forward Carter-style lead to the tune and then I follow it with a crosspicking style solo which also incorporates a few double-stops.

On the companion CD you will hear me play the Carter-style solo slow on one track followed by an even slower version of the crosspicking style solo on the next track. On the third track I play the tune with my friend John Lawless of Acutab Publications accompanying me on banjo. John leads off the "jam" track with a banjo solo. I follow John's first solo with the Carter-style break. John then takes a second solo and I follow it with the crosspicking style break.

This is a great old tune that everyone usually hears, from one source or another, when they are young. I first heard it brought into bluegrass by Earl Scruggs' great rendition on the banjo. It is a fun song to play. Good luck with it!

Home Sweet Home

Arranged by Dan Miller

Home Sweet Home (con't)

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Gypsy Jazz Guitar

by Paul Mehling

Ear Training

Gypsy-swing music, as played by Django Reinhardt, Stochelo Rosenberg, Romane, Angelo DeBarre, and others, is handed down by ear-to-ear. If you were lucky enough to have learned from your father, uncle or relative (who could very well have played with Django!) you'd not be reading this article for help! You'd already know that music is played with the ears and heart first, with the hands and brain second.

Rule #1—always trust your ears. If you hear something that sounds "funny" stop and figure out what it is and why it sounds that way. "Funny" means it's not having the effect on you (in your gut, which means your heart, more or less, no?). Don't tolerate inexplicables. I myself love anarchy and chance, but what if you played something really really great and you couldn't find your way back to do it again?! Sounds familiar? We've all had moments of inspiration that lead us to something really cool, but it vanished into thin air the minute we heard it. If you had better ears, and consequently a deeper connection to the sounds you're putting out for all the world to deal with, then you might just be able to keep the inspiration thing going.

Start today—next time you play along with a record, for instance, notice if you're really disappearing into the track. Say you're strumming the chords to some song on a record, do you have the chords right, exactly? Is your time (rhythm) totally synching up with the guys on the recording??

Or, if you're playing with a metronome, can you make it disappear (without, obviously turning it off or throwing it out the window). Tighten up your act by listening deeper. Try to learn a melody (something slow and simple to start with!) off of a recording. Spend a week (or more) just on one simple melody from a record of a guitarist you love (Reinhardt, anyone?). How close can you get to Django? Can you tell which string he's playing on? Keep sharpening yourself—your ears and your fingers. It's not impossible.

Here are some techniques to help you get closer—these are all ornamentations which some critics used to dislike about Django's playing—they said he used "too much" ornamentations for jazz. I think these are what makes Gypsy-swing so beautiful and distinct!

1) Glissandos—very simply the act of sliding up or down to a note. Very vocal-like.
2) Bends—like any good blues player, find the intervals that move you. Bend up to the note, or less common, bend the note up without picking it first, hold the note while bent and then pick it while letting it drop into it's natural resting place. Very common in country music.
3) Hammer-ons, and pull-offs. These, when combined in triplets and played fast, are also known as trills!
4) Vibrato—both horizontal, like a violin player, and vertical, or pitch-shifting, like a rock-n-roller. Like a series of quick bends up & down.
5) Tremolo—very fast picking of one note creating the illusion of sustain. Very vocal like. Also sounds like many other instruments—oud, bazouki, mandolin, etc.

These are just some of the things that will flavor your playing with some mystery. In the coming months we'll explore examples from recordings of each one of these devices. Till then; try listening for these in anything you're playing in your CD player at the moment—you'll be surprised how often they turn up!

Paul Mehling (aka Pazzo) is the leader of the notorious Hot Club of San Francisco, with 6 CDs in 10 years and constant appearances all over the planet. On the music scene in Northern California all his life, his dedication to jazz, especially Gypsy-Swing has in some small way, hopefully made the world a safer place for music. www.HCSF.com

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THE O-ZONE

by Orrin Star

Sandy River Belle

As with many old-time banjo tunes, there is a deceptive simplicity to "Sandy River Belle"—it appears easier to play than it really is.

I came up with this Norman-like treatment several years ago and ended up featuring it in a week-long guitar class which I recently taught. I was reminded just how intoxicating this simple melody can be (when played just right).

Two features of this arrangement bear noting: the liberal use of strums as part of the lead and the many harmonized notes on adjoining strings ("double-stops" in fiddle parlance). The important thing is to keep the two features separate and distinct: make sure your right hand varies what it's doing so that your strums are indeed strums and your lead notes are in fact lead notes; they are completely different animals.

Lastly, note the departure from normal pick-stroke alternation in the second measure of the B-section: the pair of eight notes (followed by a quarter note) are all "down" strokes. This burst of rest strokes adds banjo-like kick and syncopation to that phrase.

Brooklyn Bluegrass Maestro, Orrin Star is an award-winning guitar, banjo and mandolin player. The 1976 National Flatpicking Champion, he has toured and recorded widely, appeared on *A Prairie Home Companio*n and is the author of *Hot Licks for Bluegrass Guitar*. He also appears on two instructional videos produced by *Flatpicking Guitar Magazine*: *Orrin Star's Bluegrass Rhythm Guitar Workshop* and *Orrin Star's Flatpicking Primer*. See www.flatpick.com/ostar.

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Sandy River Belle

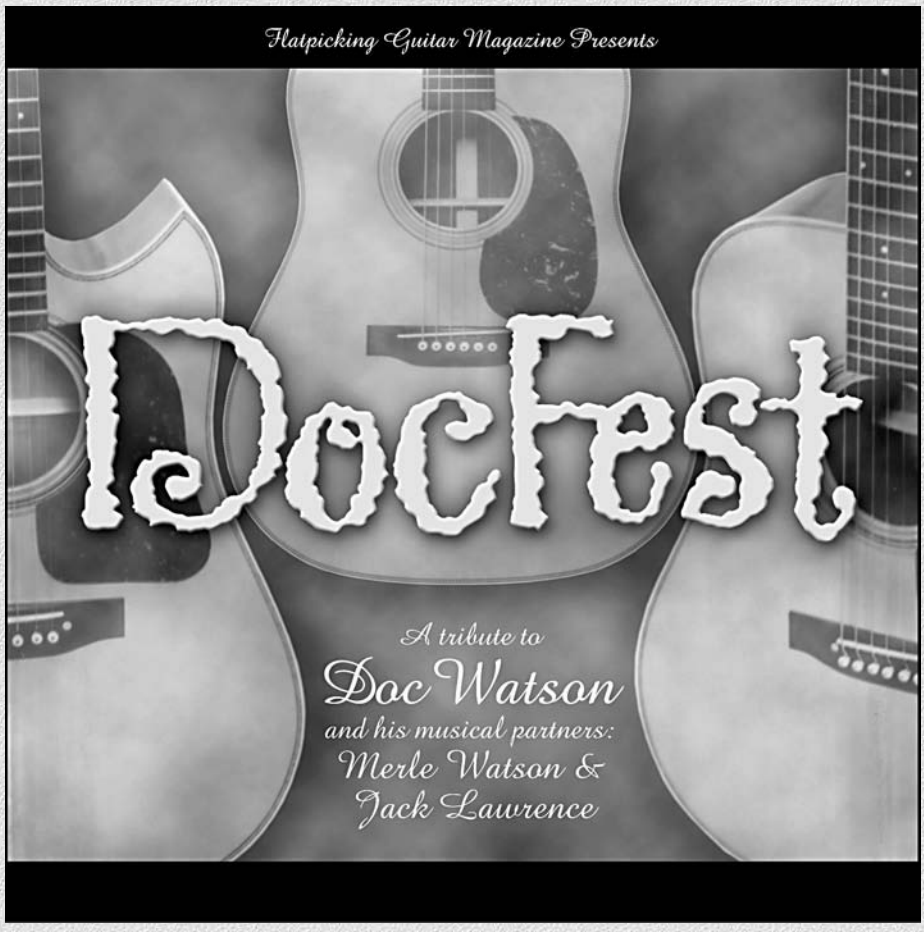
Arranged by Orrin Star

> = rest strokes

Flatpicking Guitar Magazine pays tribute to

Doc Watson, Merle Watson & Jack Lawrence

with the release of a new musical tribute CD:



This CD includes eighteen tunes by many of today's top flatpickers. Each of the artist on this project were inspired to learn the song that they perform after first hearing the song performed by Doc Watson with one of his musical partners Merle Watson or Jack Lawrence. The CD includes Fourteen Vocals Songs and Four Instrumental Tunes as follows:

Gonna Lay Down My Old Guitar	Doug Rorrer & Steve Kilby
Reuben's Train	Dix Bruce & Jim Nunally
Old Camp Meeting Time	Kenny & Amanda Smith
Deep River Blues	Jim Hurst & Missy Raines
Salt Creek/Bill Cheathum	Wyatt Rice, Tim Stafford & Rushad Eggleston
Alberta/Billy In The Lowground	Orrin Star & Russell Scholle
Train That Carried My Girl From Town	Brad Davis & Whitewater
Way Downtown	John Tindel & RST
Cotton Eyed Joe	David Grier
A-Roving On A Winter's Night	Chris & Sally Jones
The Crawdad Song	Brad Davis & Dan Miller
Rainbow	Steve Kaufman & Roy Curry
Little Sadie	Adam Granger
More Pretty Girls Than One	Craig Vance & Chris Leske
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Octaves on "Sweet Sue"

by Dix Bruce

Let's look at the technique of playing octaves on the guitar. Used liberally by jazz guitarists, the technique is also heard in the playing of acoustic and bluegrass players. It gives a wonderful, fat tone and an interesting percussive sound. Django Reinhardt was great at octaves as was Wes Montgomery. Both of them played whole solos using octaves. To play octaves on the guitar, we fret two notes, one an octave away from the other, on two different strings. Octaves are located on the following string pairs with a muted string in between: strings 1 & 3; 2 & 4; 3 & 5, or 4 & 6. If you approach them systematically, octaves are relatively easy to find and play on the fingerboard. To play octaves on strings 1 & 3 or 2 & 4, fret the notes with finger one on the lower note, and finger four on the higher of the pair. See the diagram below.

In each case one string (which needs to be muted) and two empty frets separate the fingers. Memorize this position. You can move it anywhere up and down the fingerboard on these two string sets you'll have an octave. To play octaves on strings 3 & 5 or 4 & 6, fret the notes with finger one on the lower notes and finger four on the higher of the pair. See the diagram below.

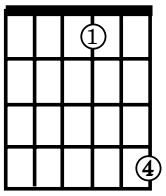
Your pattern is slightly different for these string pairs. While one muted string still separates the fretting fingers, only one empty fret is between them. Again, memorize this position. Move it up and down the fingerboard on strings 3 & 5 and 4 & 6 and you'll have octaves. As you move up the neck, the frets gets smaller and you may find that you can reach octaves on strings 1 & 3 and 2 & 4 with fretting fingers one and three. It's possible to do but I find it a bit confusing with the string 3 & 5 and 4 & 6 pattern. So, I stick to fingers one and four on strings 1 & 3 and 2 & 4; and fingers one and three on strings 3 & 5 and 4 & 6. If you learn to lock your hand in these positions, just like a chord, you'll be able to play just about anything in octaves anywhere along the fingerboard.

I mute the in-between string with my first finger. I've seen other players lay their second finger lightly on the string to accomplish the same thing. Melodies with lots of quarter notes and longer lend themselves to octave playing. That's why I chose "Sweet Sue." You should also try playing octaves on our old favorite "Avalon." Learn the single note version of "Sweet Sue" first. It's pitched in the closed, higher octave position. Some of these positions will change when we add in the lower octave notes. As always, all the music from this column is recorded and available on the accompanying CD played at slow and regular speeds.

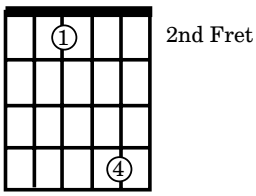
Now try the octave version. If you remember our basic approach of which fingers to use on which strings, you'll be able to figure it out. With octaves it will seem like your fretting hand is jumping around a lot—certainly more than we usually want to do with single string playing. It's kind of the nature of the beast. Keep in mind that as you progress, you'll explore ways of playing the same combinations of notes in slightly different positions. I take into account the height of the notes on the neck. Assuming that some of you probably have higher action up there that could make some note pairs difficult. By the way, there's a stomp box guitar effect from Roland called the "Octaver." With an electric guitar, it give you a kind of "instant Wes" or "Wes in a Box." The cool thing is that you won't need it now. Good Luck!

Dix's newest book/CD set is BackUP TRAX: Basic Blues for Guitar. *It is available from Musix, PO Box 231005, Pleasant Hill, CA 94523. TOLL FREE: 1-877-219-0441. Complete info is available at: musixnow.com Dix's book of Jerry Garcia acoustic guitar transcriptions from the Garcia/Grisman recording* Shady Grove *(excerpted in* Flatpicking Guitar Magazine*) is scheduled for publication in mid-2002.*

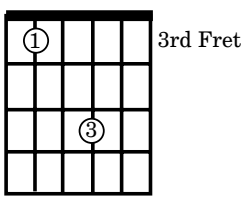
Octave Strings 1 & 3



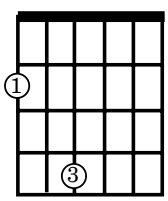
Octave Strings 2 & 4



Octave Strings 3 & 5



Octave Strings 4 & 6



Sweet Sue

Transcribed by Dix Bruce

1
Gm7 C7 Gm7 C7 F6
Ev - ry star a - bove, _ knows the one I love, _ Sweet Sue,
moon up high, _ knows the rea son - why, _ Sweet Sue,
7
C7 F6 1. 2. Cminor
_ Just you. _ And the No one else it seems, _ ev er -
_ It s you. _
13
D7 Gminor B♭m6 C7 Gm7 C7
shares my dreams, _ and with - out you dear I don t know what I d do. _ In this heart of mine,
20
Gm7 C7 F B♭7 F
_ you live all the time, _ Sweet Sue, _ just you. _

Sweet Sue

Transcribed by Dix Bruce

Gm7 C7 Gm7 C7 F6
Ev - ry star a - bove, _ knows the one I love, _ Sweet Sue,
moon up high, _ knows the rea son - why, _ Sweet Sue,
C7 F6 Cminor D7
1. 2.
_ Just you. _ And the No one else it seems, _ ev er - shares my dreams,
_ It s you. _
Gminor B♭m6 C7 Gm7 C7
_ and with - out you dear I don t know what I d do. _ In this heart of mine,
Gm7 C7 F B♭7 F
_ you live all the time, _ Sweet Sue, _ just you. _

Music Theory:
Mastering the Fingerboard
Technical Studies for Flatpickers

by Michel A. Maddux

Finding the Notes

Today we begin with a technique to find any note on the guitar, and then discuss playing using only the upper three strings.

You have three reference points on the guitar which can be used to find any note on any string. They are first position, fifth position, and 12th position.

Using the Reference Points:

You probably already know the notes on the top string, the high E string. The low E string is exactly the same, so you already know all of the notes on two strings.

If you don't know the names of the notes all the way up the neck on the E string, it is time to learn them.

Each open E string sounds an E note—the lower note, played on the low E string, is two octaves below the high E string, but otherwise the notes at every position on one E string are the same on the other, but an octave higher or lower.

Every string on the guitar when played open, sounds the note that is the name of the string, e.g. A, D, G, and so on. This is the first reference point.

Starting on the E string, count up chromatically from first position: E (open), F, F#, G, G#, A, and so on.

Notice that when you get to the A in fifth position you are at the second reference point.

The Second Reference Point:

The fifth fret reference is pretty easy to remember because of the way that beginners learn to tune the instrument.

You are probably used to tuning the guitar by playing the fifth fret A on the low E string, then tuning the A string to that note. Now we are going to use that information to figure out what the notes are on the fifth fret.

Starting with the low E string, play the fifth fret—which is an A. When you fret the A string at the fifth fret it sounds a D note. On the D string, play the fifth fret and it sounds a G. In each case, you confirm that it is the correct note by using the open string—your first reference point.

Play the fourth fret G string and it sounds a B; you should confirm this by playing the open B string. Finally, play the B string fifth fret, and it sounds an E, which you confirm with the open high E string.

The Third Reference Point:

The 12th fret is the next reference point on the guitar. Notice that each string when fretted at the 12th fret, is the same as the open string, except one octave higher. Confirm this by playing any open string, then play the string fretted at the 12th fret. So, to find an Eb note on either E string, find the E at the 12th fret, then lower the note 1/2 step, or one fret. The 11th fret on the E string is an Eb.

Finding the Eb:

Now, find the Eb note on the other strings. Starting with the B string, the fifth fret reference is an E, so play the Eb on the B string at the 4th fret.

On the G string, the fifth fret reference is a C note, (confirm by playing fifth fret G string, and first fret B string - they are both a C note. If they are not, better tune up!). Now, move up from the fifth fret C, using C#, D, D#/Eb. Play the Eb on the G string on the 8th fret. Confirm that you have found the Eb note by playing the 4th fret B string Eb.

On the D string, use the first and 12th position reference points. Play the D string fretted at the first fret (an Eb) and play the D string fretted at the 13th fret (also an Eb).

For the A string, play the fifth fret D, then up to the 6th fret Eb.

So, using the reference points, and a bit of practice, you can find any note in the 12 note chromatic scale, on any string. Spend a few minutes now with this concept, and find the F# on each string. Hint: The first one is on the E string at the 2nd fret.

Great things happen in Threes:

Another important concept to understanding the fingerboard is the concept of threes.

There are literally thousands of chords on the guitar, so what we have to do is break that number down into the most useful chords for the flatpicker, as some chords are either too hard to finger, or just do not sound right.

The examples that follow demonstrate how the scale forms relate to the chord forms, using the upper three strings (upper in pitch, meaning the G-B-E strings). This is a pretty long topic, so it will probably take me a couple of columns to completely explain it. In this issue we will cover the C and F forms.

Play the first position C chord. Move it up one fret, and play the Db chord in first position as shown in Example 1. Notice that continuing to move up the fingerboard changes the chord to the next chromatic interval. The bottom string is the root, and the notes in the chord are 1-3-5-1-3. A major triad consists of the notes 1-3-5. Usually the upper octave is repeated, so a basic root position major chord contains the notes 1-3-5-1. As you can see in example 1, the C chord form contains the major chord with a repeated third on top.

Look at the top three notes of the C chord in example 1. They are the notes 5-1-3, in order played, of the major chord. This form is also known as the "2nd inversion" major chord. 2nd inversion means that the fifth is in the bass of the major chord, while a first inversion has the third in the bass.

Although this is a 2nd inversion chord, it does contain all of the requisite notes (1-3-5) of the major triad. The root of the chord is found in the middle, played on the B string.

Using the "find the note" exercise above, play the top three notes and say the name

of the chord, as in third position D, fifth position F, and seventh position G.

Notice that playing the entire chord in each position allows you to play the complete major scale from that position as shown in example 2.

The notes in the F chord, example 3 and starting at the bottom are, 1-5-1-3-5-1. Notice that the upper 4 strings are again the 1-3-5-1 major chord and that the top three strings form the 1-3-5 major triad, but in 1st inversion order, i.e. 3-5-1.

Relative Minor:

The relative minor is the minor key that has the same key signature as the major key. The relative minor is frequently used in western music. Think of tunes like "Billy in the Lowground" (C Major to A minor), and "Blackberry Blossom" (G major to E minor). Many other examples exist.

Remember that in the simplest form of the chord (the three-note form or triad) the difference between a major chord and a minor chord is only one note. The major chord contains notes 1-3-5 of the scale; the minor chord is notes 1-b3-5 of the scale.

Where is the relative minor to the three note chord form we are using today?

By changing one note in the C chord form, as in example 4, we are playing the relative minor.

This works for every key in every position on the fingerboard. See this example for an illustration and exercise using this major/relative minor concept.

Exercise 4 shows an experiment with these two forms, and introduces the E minor form.

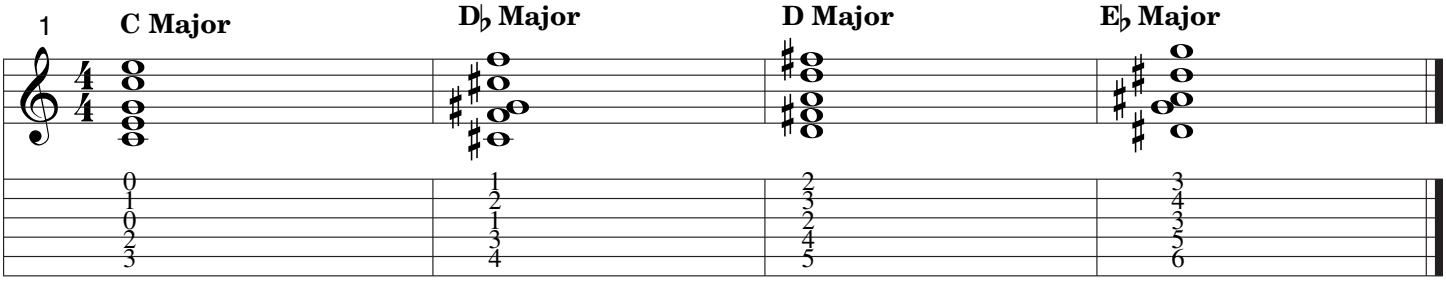
For your practice, move this exercise to other positions. For example, starting in fifth position F, play example 4 and you have the relative minor and IV/V chords to F under your fingertips. You should determine which chords they are to complete your study.

About the Tune:

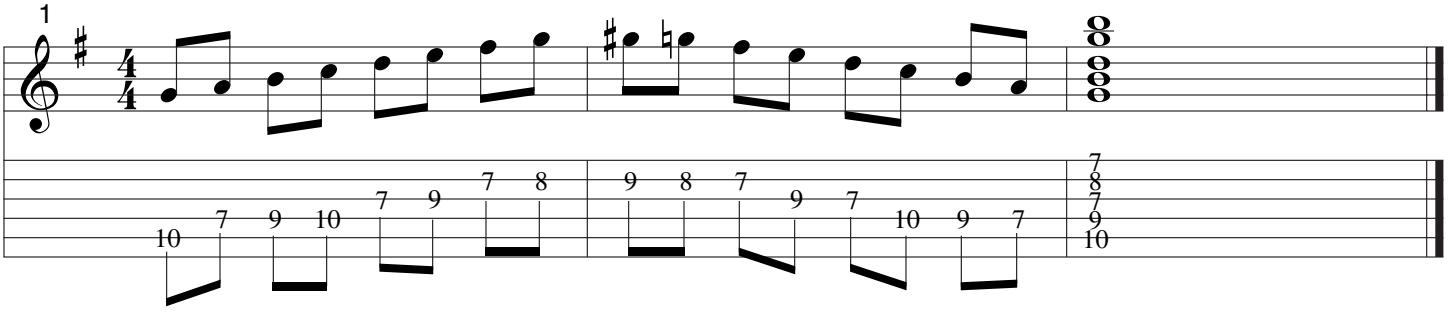
"Cherokee Shuffle" is one of my favorite tunes to play. In the version presented below, I use this concept of playing the I-IV-V-vi chords (the vi is the minor 6th, the relative minor) to provide a variation on the tune. As always, to illustrate the point I deliberately insert the exercise in the tune, which changes the melody slightly.

In the next issue, we will continue with more on the "most important" three note forms for flatpickers.

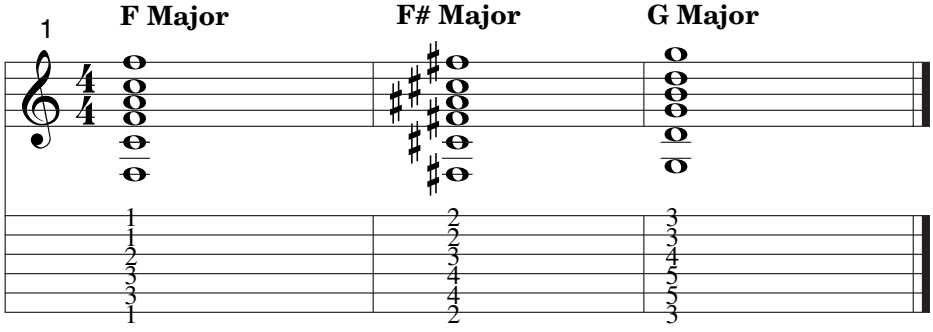
Example 1: C, Db, D, Eb Major Chord Forms



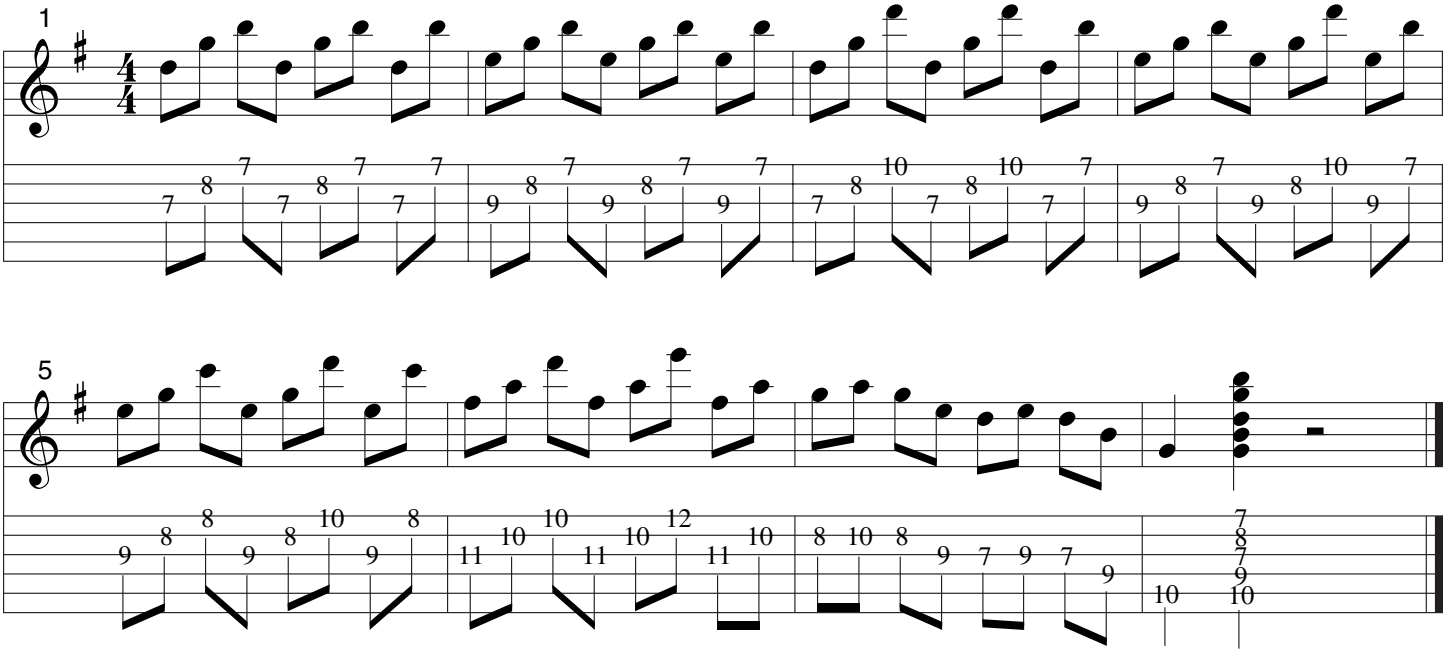
Example 2: Key of G, Seventh Position



Example 3: F, F#, G Major Chord Forms



Example 4: Using the major and minor forms



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Brian Yetter —York, PA

"I had a great time in Roanoke and learned a lot. Nobody can complain about the food, it was great. The hotel folks were very tolerant considering. There was jammin' everywhere. Hope I can return next year. Thanks again."

Bill Aeschliman — Craddockville, VA

Our roster of instructors is still being finalized as this issue goes to press, but will be available on the web site by the time you receive this. Please visit us online, or call to get more information.

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Flatpicking Guitar Magazine

Cherokee Shuffle

Arranged by Mike Maddux

Gospel Guitar

with Harold Streeter

Intros and Tags

Editor's Note: This is a continuation (part 2) of the article that Harold Streeter submitted for the previous issue. Due to its length, I split the article into two parts. For consistency, and for those who may not have the previous issue, I am reprinting Harold's intro to this article as it appeared in the previous issue and then we will pick up with the 7th variation. (Variations 1 through 6 appeared in the previous issue.)

In lieu of a gospel song, what follows is a collection of intro and tag combinations that you may find useful for kicking off hundreds of gospel, country, and bluegrass songs. Some are more appropriate for slow tempo songs, while others are intended for moderate to fast tempo songs. This is by no means a definitive collection. First, there is no such thing, and second, all of the combinations are limited to the key of G—the most common bluegrass setting. Rather, what follows here is just an assembly of bits, pieces, influences, and conjurings cobbled together over the years that work for me.

Traditionally, intros have been, and still are for the most part, based on the last 4 bars of songs in the folk, country, bluegrass, and gospel genres. Two models that come to mind are "Red River Valley"and "Worried Man Blues." If you play either of those tunes or can hear them in your head, fast-forward to the last line and take a listen. The melodies in the last lines of the two tunes are of course not the same, but the chord progressions are. In the key of G for example, the chord progression of the last line in both tunes consists of two measures of D followed by two measures of G. It's a structure sometimes referred to as a "5-1" progression, respectively named for the fifth and first notes of a major scale.

The intro examples here, derived from that structure, consist of four components: a "kick-off," followed by two measures of the "5" or D chord; then two measures of the "1" or G chord, and a measure which leads to a vocal or introduces another instrument. The kick-off (so called because it kicks off the tune) can be either a full or partial measure of notes which often descends to some starting note in the D chord. Once in the D chord, anything goes, so long as the phrases are related to a D chord. The following two measures of G consist, either fully or partially again, of a "tag", and the lead-in measure immediately following consists of notes which are still based on the G chord.

Now, since the title of this column is "Intros and Tags," a word or two about tags is in order. Unlike chord runs, that pass from chord to chord, tags are the runs we all tend to collect and play that function just like punctuation. They're periods at the end of sentences, in other words, and when playing in the key of G, we call them "G-runs." In addition to their use in the body of songs (typically in the 15th bar, and sometimes also in the 3rd and/or 7th bars), they're integral parts of intros because they tell everybody you've finished, and that it's time to sing or do something else.

Variations 7 through 12:

Variation 7 also works for slow to moderate tempo tunes, and it also features a double-tag.

Next, we get into some bluesy sounding intros with Variations 8 and 9.
Both come with kick-offs and tags based on the blues scale, with the only difference being that variation 9 is kind of bluesy throughout.

Variation 10 begins with another ascending kick-off. This time, the following D chord measures consist of cross picked phrases which descend to a low G note—the first note of the tag. The tag is essentially a Reno-style banjo lick. Variation 11 is another that works well for moderate to fast tempo songs. Here, the kick-off notes ascend again, while the lead-in to a vocal or other instrument descends.

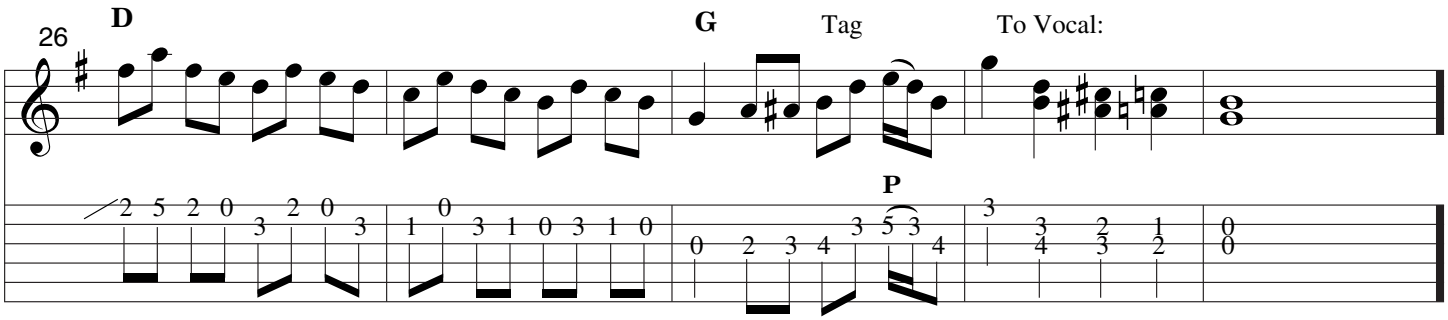
Finally, Variation 12. This intro also works well for moderate to fast tempo tunes but it differs from the previous ones in that its chord progression is a 4-5-1; in other words, the C, D, and G chords. Although such progressions are not played as often as the simpler 5-1 forms, it occasionally comes in handy for songs in these genres.

Again, this is not a complete collection of intros; the key of G alone offers many other variations, not to mention all of the other keys in need of exploration. You can, however, expand the potential of the intros shown here through component interchangeability. You may find for example that you prefer following the kick-off in Variation 3 with the two D chord measures in Variation 5, followed by the tag in Variation 2, and so on. By experimenting with them, you'll make them your own, and almost anything goes. In addition, for songs you feel are in need of a little symmetry, all of the intros may double as endings.

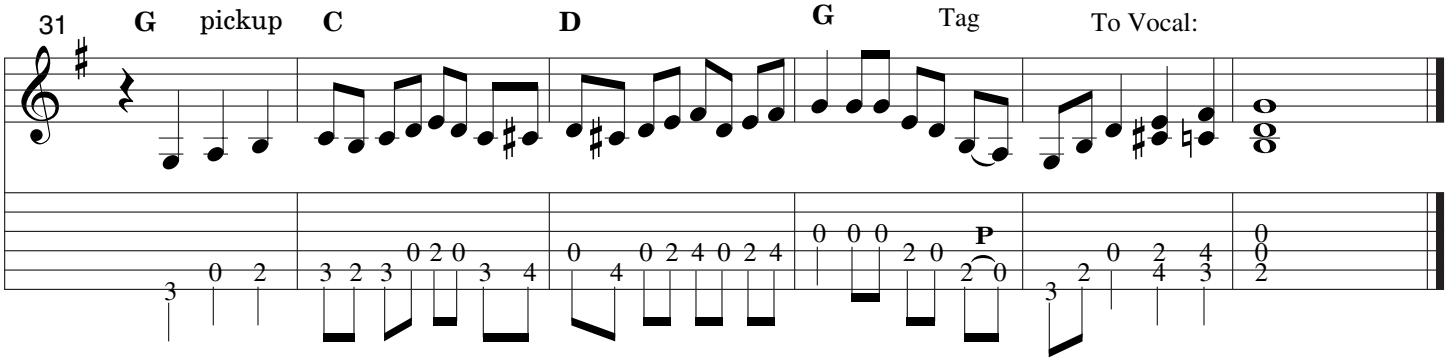
Please pay us a visit at our web site; www.lewalt.com. Speaking of web sites, one worthy of mention is www.bluegrasslyrics.com. The site is a gold mine in that it features lyrics for hundreds of gospel and bluegrass songs all for the very cheap price of free!

Harold is currently working on a 5-book mandolin and banjo series for Mel Bay Publications (titles to be announced as they become available), and has played lead guitar, 5-string banjo, and mandolin the past four years for the "Riders of the Rockin' B" - a traditional western (Sons of the Pioneers, etc), Texas swing, and bluegrass band, in the Pacific Northwest.

7th Variation
1
G
pickup
D
G
Double Tag
To Vocal:
8th Variation
6
G
pickup
D
G
Double Tag
9th Variation
11
To Vocal:
G
pickup
D
10th Variation
16
G
Tag
To Vocal:
G
pickup
D
11th Variation
21
G
Tag
To Vocal:
G
pickup



12th Variation



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The following piece is an original composition from the *Classics for Flatpicking Guitar*. The piece is in G minor and should be played with a free feeling. Special care should be taken to see that the passages are played cleanly. Each note should have a clear, bell-like tone. Try playing it at a mezzo-piano dynamic level. Also, think in terms of 8 measure phrases. The middle section changes into G major and should be played with a more pronounced lyrical feeling. I hope you enjoy "Excursion."

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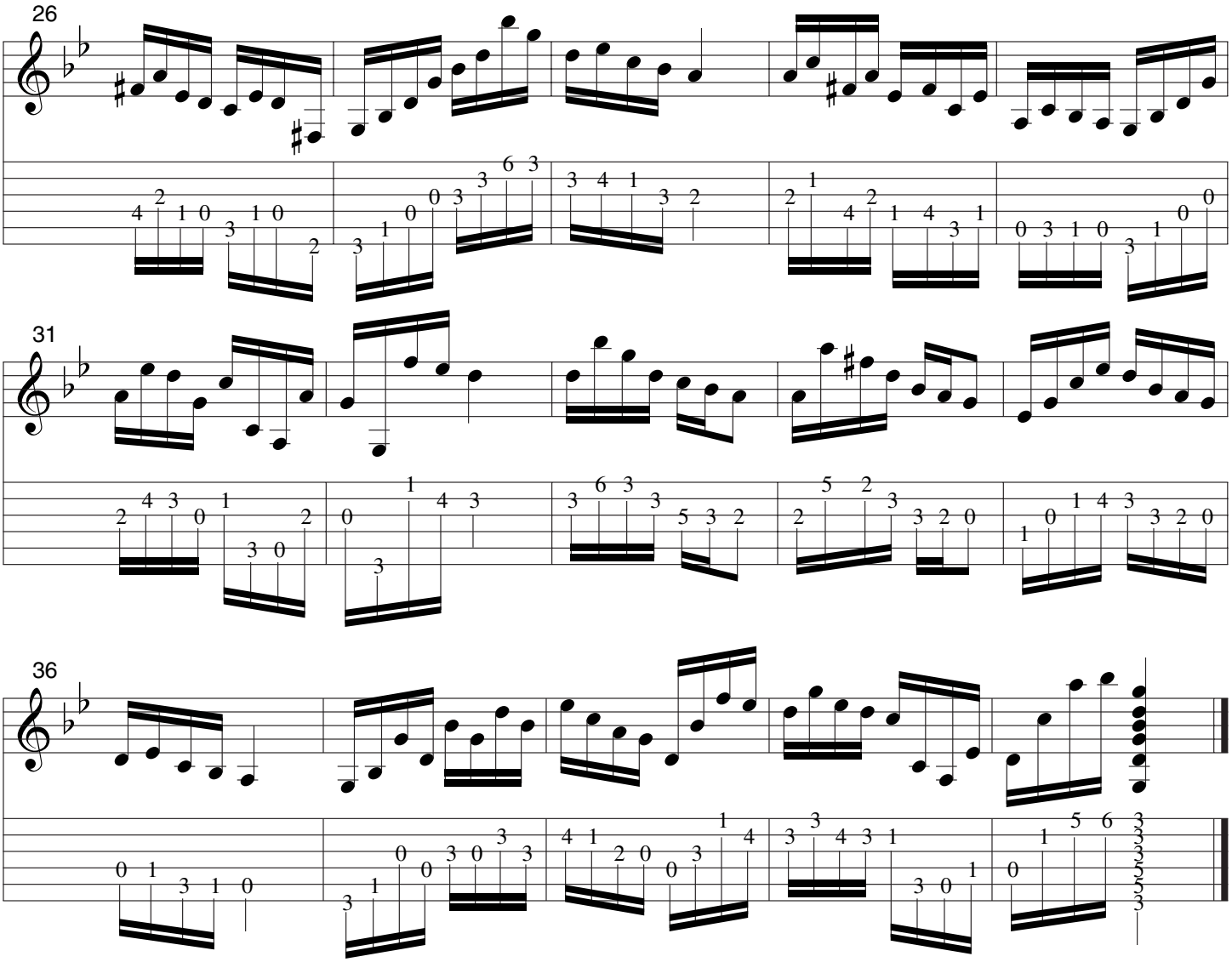
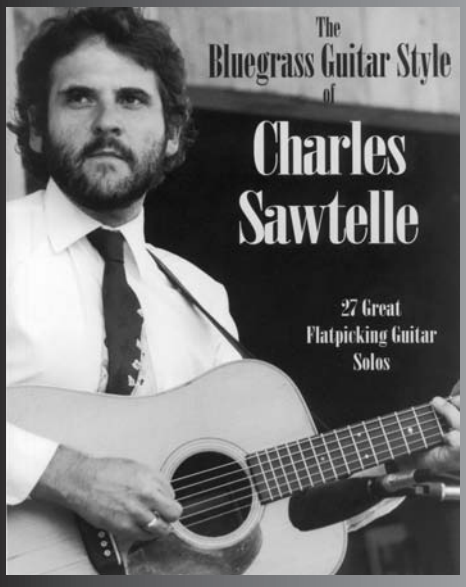
Excursion (con't)





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PICKIN' FIDDLE TUNES

by Adam Granger

THREE FUN TUNES!

Hey, are you ready for some fun? I mean it: If you ain't ready for some serious **fun**, just move along to someone else's column, 'cause *Chez Granger*, *les bons temps* are the order of the day. I mean, I'm sure that many of the writers for *Flatpicking Guitar* just want to bust your chops and make you work work work, but not ol' fun-lovin' Adam. Nossir, he's here to dispense frivolity, gaity and jollity. And how's he gonna do that? With scantily-clad dancing girls and (let's be equitable here) -guys? No. With big tables full of treats? No. With a trio of fiddle tunes that are so easy to pick and that lay so naturally on the guitar that they redefine "fun"? Yes!

Growling Old Man and Cackling Old Woman and *Kitchen Gal* are old-time tunes that have been adopted by bluegrassers as well, and that may be familiar to you the reader. *The Headlight Reel*, unless you're a serious student of fiddle tunes *via* either my book or the *Cole's* collection, will be new fodder (For more info on *Cole's*, see *FGM*, V3, N2). It's a Reg Hill tune of Canadian lineage. Oh, and as long as we're attributing here, I borrow heavily from Henry Moore for my version of *Kitchen Gal*.

Okay, let's crank up the Mirth Factor!

READING *EASYTAB*

Easytab is like conventional tablature, except that timing notation has been streamlined and simplified. Since fiddle tunes are comprised mainly of eighth notes, *Easytab* uses the eighth note as its basic unit. An eighth rest is indicated by a dot. Therefore, a note with a dot after it is a quarter note, and a note with three dots after it is a half note. There are a total of eight notes and rests per measure.

FOR BEGINNERS

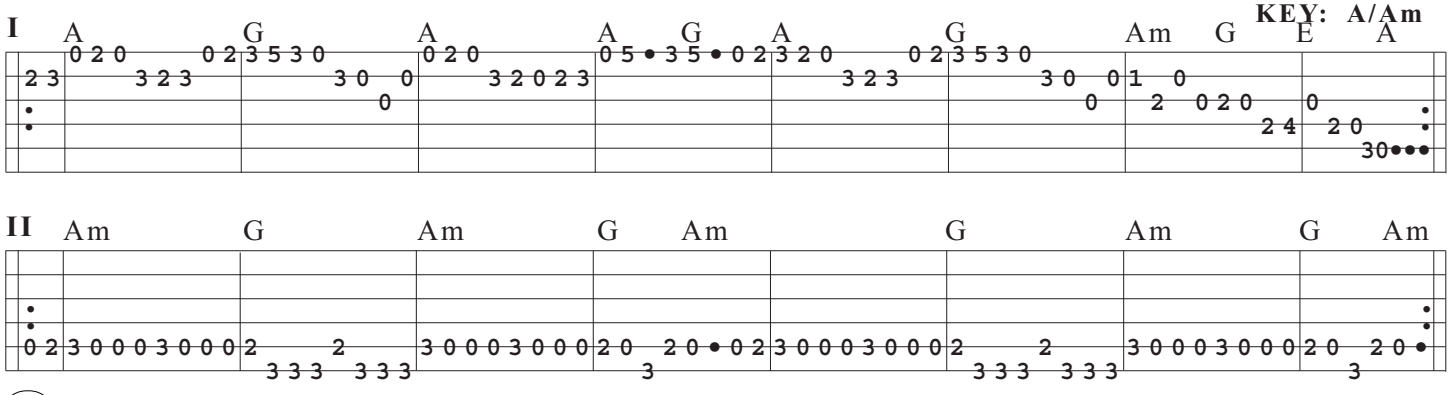
Pick with an alternating style: down-up-down-up-down-up etc. The first note of each measure should be a downstroke, the last an upstroke. **Include rests** in this alternating pattern. This keeps you "in synch", playing downstrokes on the beats, so that, no matter what the configuration of notes and rests in an eight-unit measure, the right hand plays them down-up-down-up-down-up-down-up.

The denominators common to all three of these tunes are that they're easy to play, limited as they are almost exclusively within the first and second positions on the neck, and they contain melodic lines and patterns that you may not have dealt with before. *Growling Old Man* (as it's known for short) and *Kitchen Gal* are A/Am tunes, and so draw heavily from those scales; *The Headlight Reel* is a D tune, and so uses the D scale largely, but in a really—here comes that word again—**fun** way. More on that later; let's get to work.

Growling Old Man has a number of titles, all of them related. Kenny Baker calls it *Growling Old Man and Woman*, but it's also known as *Growling Old Man, Growling Old Woman*, *Grumbling Old Man and Growling Old Woman* and, in a less judgmental vein, *The Old Man and The Old Woman*. I like the title given here because it sort of describes the musical action in the tune, albeit flipped around (which brings me to the next musicological point: this tune is often played with the parts reversed. One would then have the low, "growling" part first and the high, "cackling" part second).

Play the first part all out of second position, except for the last two measures. The second part is all about groove. This tune is a favorite for both square and contra dances. Let 'er rip!

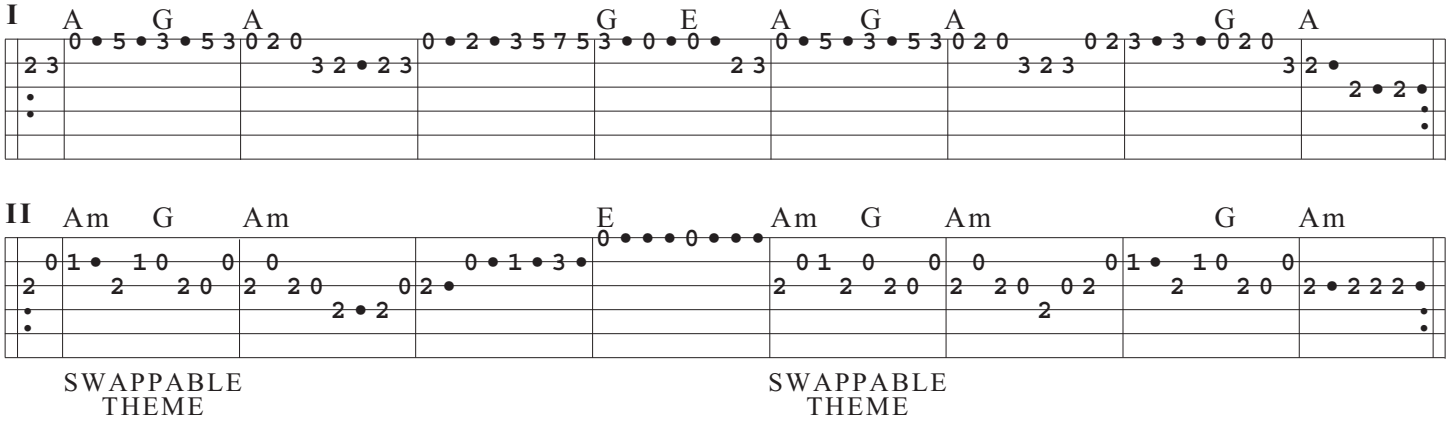
GROWLING OLD MAN AND CACKLING OLD WOMAN



Kitchen Gal goes out of position once, in the third measure of the first part. Fret that 3-5-7 with your first, second and fourth fingers. I've presented the theme of the second part in two slightly different ways, identified as "swappable themes", because you can mix and match them. (Don't know what I'm talking about? Check out "Anatomy of a Fiddle Tune" in *FGM*, V1, N5.)

KITCHEN GAL

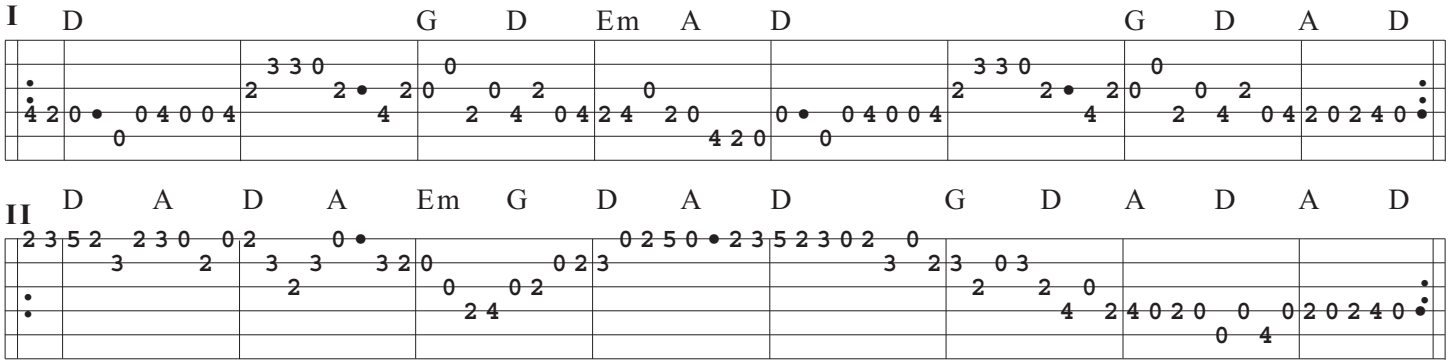
KEY: A/Am



And finally, on to *The Headlight Reel*. This tune starts and just keeps going until it's done. Yeah, yeah, I know all tunes do that, but some do it more than others. The quality I'm describing here is that of a passage starting and continuing without interruption far beyond where one expects it to end. This is especially noticeable in the second half of the second part. The phrase starts on the high A and, over the next thirty eighth-notes, meanders downward to end at the last possible moment on the low D. Talk about fun!! This is a wonderful, largely undiscovered tune that would be a welcome addition to any band or jam session repertoire (hint hint).

THE HEADLIGHT REEL

KEY: D



Those students among you who vetted my column on folded scales (*FGM*, V6 N3) will recognize a number of two-note folded scale passages in this tune. The fun thing about their use, however, is that just when you think you're heading into an extended folded scale passage, the melody does an about face, or injects a little arpeggio. Sort of leaves a person looking like, well, a deer in headlights.

All right, folks, there's enough good times here to last a hedonist's lifetime. Ain't music amazing? All this fun, and it doesn't cost any more than the price of a decent guitar and a subscription to *Flatpicking Guitar Magazine*. I've never understood the jealous or grumpy attitude many of my students' spouses have toward their beloveds' interest in bluegrass and old-time music. There are so many nasty, dangerous, unhealthy, illegal and immoral ways to pass the time. Why would anyone object to someone sitting around picking tunes? And hey, if you feel left out, learn to play an instrument!

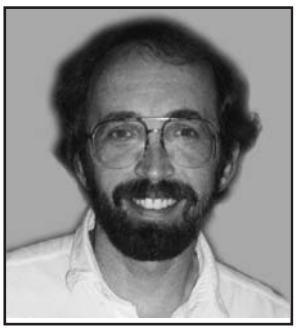
All right, end of sermon. Until next time, I remain your obedient servant in good clean *fun*. . .

Adam went to the United Kingdon in April with banjoist/mandolinist Dick Kimmel. They played nine cities in eleven days, hosted by members of the Scottish Bluegrass Music Association and the British Bluegrass Music Association. After playing Edinborough their first night, they played both coasts of Scotland the second day—Aberdeen on the east coast and Irvine on the west—and then drove south to Helsby, near Liverpool, and then north and east to Staindrop, in North Yorkshire. Llandielo, Wales was next, followed by Kenilworth, then London, and, finally, Lewes, near the southern coast. Adam and Dick put 1000 miles on their rental car and didn't hit anyone or anything—this despite the fact that everyone drives on the wrong side of the road in the United Kingdom.

Exploring Bluegrass Guitar

Bluegrass Classics

by Steve Pottier



Working Out a Break to "If I Should Wander Back Tonight"

Sometimes the hardest part of figuring out a good break to a song is figuring out the melody. One problem I have is assuming I know just how the melody goes. I hear a lot of people (including me) "rounding off" or just changing the melody in their singing. When I hear someone sing the actual melody, it's a minor revelation - "oh, *that's* how it goes." Even when I learn it exactly, it may degenerate over time as I forget key turns or modify it to make it easier/possible for me to play or sing. Still, it is a worthwhile effort to figure it out at least once, then the changes you make will come from knowledge rather than ignorance.

Start by figuring out the chords and where the changes take place in relation to the words. If you can't figure out the chords yourself, get someone to help you, or search the Internet for them. Write down the words to the verse or chorus you're working on using some tab paper (or just line some tab out with a ruler if you need to). Now find notes that you recognize and write the note in tab under the word or syllable it applies to. I look for held out notes first because they're easier to hear, and they will nearly always be somewhere in the chord you are holding for that part of the song. I've done this for Flatt and Scruggs's song "If I Should Wander Back Tonight." The melody notes I found first are in bold print. Note that most of ones I found first fell at the beginning of the measure. After you get those first important notes start filling in the blanks. Get a note for each syllable. Wait a day and check yourself. This is good ear training and will help with improvisation. In finding the notes, some were very obvious but some I had to go back over several times, stopping the music and singing the note I wanted and then finding it on the guitar. Lester is a bit tricky in that some of the notes are smoothly slurred, and it's hard to duplicate that on guitar (check the note for "me" in the phrase "fortune never came to me"). A little hint here: F&S played this in G# (gulp!). Actually, they played in G with their instruments tuned up. I put a capo on the first fret to play along.

Once you have the melody you have to decide how much of it to use for a solo. Sometimes it's appropriate to use every single melody note, but in bluegrass it is more common to hear key notes and phrases with other ideas thrown in. You can hear this in the fiddle break as he starts very close to the melody. In the second line ("like a gypsy...") he changes and goes for a fiddle run that finally hits the melody on the change to D ("place to *place*"). He uses the same formula for the second half of his break- first phrase, melody and second phrase, improv. Not a bad way to think about a break. The melody keeps you grounded in the flavor of the song, the improv adds something different and interesting. Scruggs' banjo break has almost none of the melody, but it works because 1) it's not the opening break to the song and 2) he retains the feel of the song in his phrasing and bounce, so that it still feels like part of the song and not just random rambling.

As I started working on ideas for this song, I was working in the metronome range of 70-80 bpm. When I started cranking it up to F&S speed (110-115) I found that some of the ideas sounded cramped or rushed- they didn't fit the feel of the song, even though they worked fine at the slower speed. For instance, Example 3 starts with a run using the open G string every other note. At the slow tempo this gives a nice bounce, but at the faster tempo it sounds muddy and rushed (and no, it wasn't my playing, it was just how the phrase works at different tempos). After you've worked out some ideas, try them at or close to speed and see if they seem as natural to the rhythm as the singer. You may find (as I did) that you want to take out some notes.

Examples 1-4 are ideas for the opening phrase of the song.

Example 1 uses a common lead in with a harmony G note on the first string, and it matches the melody perfectly. In measure 2 I added an extra G note (the third note) as it made it feel smoother to me.

Example 2 starts the break out of an F shape held at the 3rd fret. I move up with the chromatic run, then jump back to the starting position get the next three notes. The 6-5-4 I get using fingers 3-2-1. The

next measure I use a push off (rather than a pull off); it puts me in better position for getting to the C chord, where I use a down-up-down-up cross picking pattern.

Example 3 starts the same way as Example 2 but uses the open G string to give it a bounce. Hit the 7th fret with your third finger and hit the 8th fret of the 2nd string with your little finger. You slide back down with a kind of indefinite slide—you're really looking for the D note (3rd fret second string) of the melody. Then you bounce down to the G note, echoing the opening idea of open notes against fretted notes. The quick grace note hammer is a Bill Monroe thing, though he would generally use a slide. More bouncing down to the C chord and a slight variation on the cross picking.

Example 4 is an idea for working out a break higher up the neck. The actual notes are similar to Example 2. Find the position using your first finger on the 7th fret of the G string, first finger on the 8th fret, B string, and the third finger on the 9th fret, D string. The slides are slight moves out of this chord position. Another push off and more cross picking with another little filler tagged on. Cross picking is a great way for a guitar to deal with held out melody notes in a song.

So now it comes time to put it together for a break (Example 5). I started with Example 3, but pared out some of the notes as discussed above. I decided to echo the fiddle break for the next run, then slide into the D7 chord, melody note on the 4th string. Notice that I could also use the D7 chord in the first position, they're the same notes, but I like the slide up and this move leaves you open to some other possibilities. Back to the melody (mostly) using the F shape at the 3rd fret for the G chord, and a barre at the 5th fret for the C chord. I end with some double stop slides, a slide to the 4th fret with my first finger, and I'm in position to finish off the a single note run to G and shifting position to do a tag run in the first position. This break has followed the formula of the fiddle: Melody, Improv, Melody, Improv.

The medium tempo bluegrass songs like this one are well suited for guitar, and fun to play. It's great ear training to find the melody and try to work it into your solos, and it's challenging to figure out how to deal with held notes and spaces.

Steve Pottier stevepottier@attbi.com

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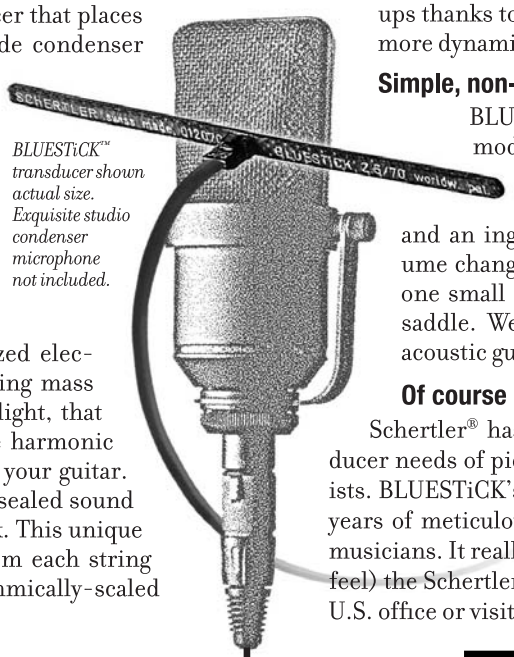

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If I Should Wonder Back Tonight

Arranged by Steve Pottier

If I Should Wonder Back Tonight (con't)

Example 4

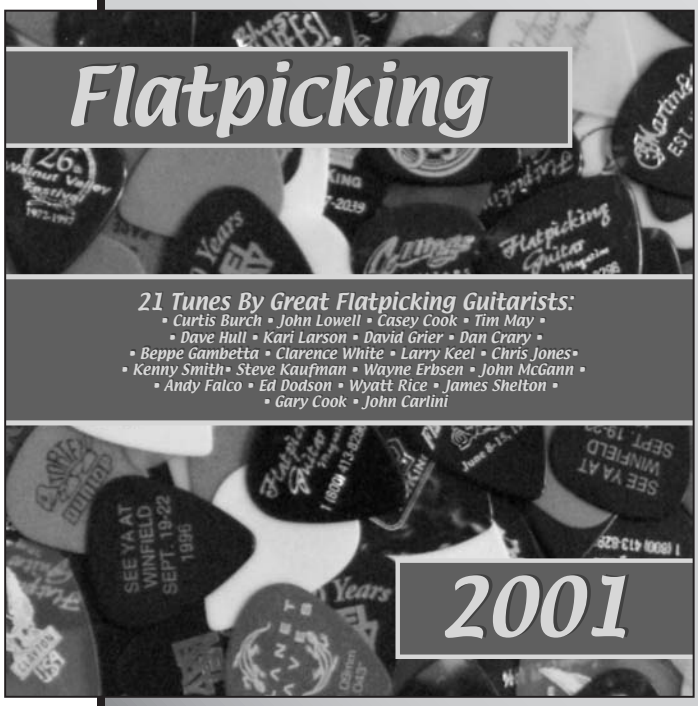
John McGann's Eclectic Acoustic

Wall of Stone

Here's a slippery solo that you can have some fun with. Part of the sliding sound is achieved by alternating between the open D string and the fingered D (5th fret of the A string). I tried to stay low in first position on this solo, to suit the darker mood of the song.

John McGann is a Boston based musician with four books about to be released by Mel Bay Publications: "Upslide" (transcriptions from John's Green Linnet solo CD) and "Creating Variations on American Fiddle Tunes", each book in guitar and mandolin editions.

Flatpicking 2001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9 *Jerry's Farewell* **Larry Keel**
10 *Little Stretch of Road* **John McGann** & Chris Moore
11 *Shake & Howdy* **Andy Falco** w/Buddy Merriam
12 *Temerance Reel/Pacific Slope/Golden Eagle Hornpipe* **Steve Kaufman**
13 *Freeborn Man* **Dan Crary & Beppe Gambetta**
14 *Silver Bell* **Wayne Erbsen**
15 *Light of the Moon* **Tim May** w/Crucial Smith
16 *Sailor's Hornpipe* **Dave Hull & Kari Larson**
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Wall of Stone

New Release Highlight

Rebecca Hoggan: *Born In East Virginia*

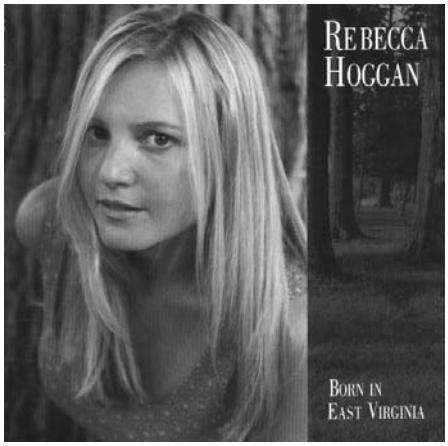
by Chris Thiessen

If a prophet lacks credit in her home town, the release of Rebecca Hoggan's second CD *Born in East Virginia* should go a long way to restoring that credit, regardless of where she lives. FGM caught up with flatpicker Rebecca Hoggan when she stopped briefly in her home town of Richmond, VA to talk about her latest CD, music in general, and what it's like to be a woman flatpicker amongst a vast multitude of male pickers.

Now residing in Colorado, Rebecca currently plays with three bands: the All Night Honky Tonk All Stars (a Gram Parsons/ Emmy Lou Harris 70s-style country/ western/bluegrass band), Hit & Run (an amalgam of hot young pickers who play contemporary bluegrass, emulating the style of Dan Tyminski and the Lonesome River Band) and Scrub Hoggs (a Skaggs and Rice-style gospel trio). Working with each band allows Rebecca to keep busy and to push her vocal and flatpicking skills in many directions.

In a similar vein, *Born in East Virginia* gives Rebecca a chance to demonstrate her cross-genre musical muscles to all the folks who don't live in Colorado. Performing tunes from Cole Porter, Bill Monroe, Loretta Lynn, and Johnny Mercer , as well as a healthy dose of original compositions (half of the cuts are either original tunes or arrangements) is a stellar crowd of familiar and soon-to-be-familiar names. Joining Rebecca are Todd Phillips (bass), Darol Anger (fiddle), San Pointer (mandolin), Todd Livingston (Dobro), and Joe Craven (occasional percussion). Of course, Rebecca handles the lead and rhythm guitar and vocals, assisted by David Mosher, and flatpicker par excellence Jim Nunally (profiled in *FGM* Vol 2 No 6 Sept/Oct 1998) took the helm for the engineering and production duties.

When we began talking about the cuts on the CD, Rebecca emphasized the artistic debt she had to Jim Nunally. He not only produced the CD and arranged for some of the stellar session musicians, but helped Rebecca polish some of her leads. "He'd



record pieces and then make suggestions about how I might improve the tone or timing or whatever. I'd immediately go home and work on his suggestions so I could apply that in the studio the next day. A producer and a mentor; a great guy!"

But on to the CD. *Born in East Virginia* includes:

"High on a Mountain": First up on the CD is a hard-charging traditional bluegrass number. Rebecca opens with a crosspicking lick, and follows up with a break after the third chorus, playing up the dynamics of her guitar's mid-range. This tune sets the tone for the rest of the CD: quality picking across the board matched with great solo and ensemble vocals.

"Big Mon": "Originally I put this together as a contest tune," Rebecca explains, "so there's a little more flash that I might normally use. I've had only a couple of chances to use it in competition, but it's still a lot of fun to play." Although it's not tabbed out, we recommend readers spend some time with Rebecca's break on this tune!

"Too Darn Hot": While attending Boston's Berklee School of Music in 1998, Rebecca learned this Cole Porter classic during the hottest summer of her life. It's a great bouncy jazz tune that gives Rebecca a chance to show off both her jazz vocalizations and her rhythm & lead work.

"Don't Come Home a-Drinkin'": Added for fun and because Rebecca is a big Loretta Lynn fan. Okay, so maybe Loretta Lynn is not a well-known bluegrass songwriter, but Rebecca's version is well worth the listen.

"Faithless Love": "Linda Ronstadt's version of this J.D. Souther tune chills me each time I hear it." Listen to the arpeggiated intro carefully: there's a great balance between the guitar and bass. Supporting her soulful vocals is Darol's fiddle work and harmony vocals from David Mosher, as well as Sam's tasteful mandolin work.

"Bowling Green": Adapting Laurie Lewis's up-tempo version of this traditional tune, Rebecca tears into the first solo with a high-energy straightforward lead.

"Telluride Mandolin": For this original instrumental Rebecca switches to mandolin; the inspiration came from the combination of a spectacular Colorado sunset and an early evening winter thunder snowstorm.

"East Virginia": Folk song aficionados might recognize this dark ballad from Joan Baez's repertoire, but this version features David Mosher on lead vocals with Rebecca on harmony. We've tabbed out Rebecca's haunting guitar break for this tune, as well as included it on the audio CD accompanying this issue.

"Autumn Leaves": A Johnny Mercer tune and another opportunity for the band to show off those jazz chops! Rebecca begins the tune with a solo, then sings accompanied only by Todd and Joe, and then exchanges a series of solos with Darol and Todd for the rest of the tune.

"Big Hogg": Another Hoggan original, this instrumental is the musical outgrowth of Rebecca and Todd Livingston sitting around and trading musical ideas. Listen especially to how the basic theme bounces around with each instrument.

"Sweet Georgia Brown": Relying on her clean rhythm chops, Rebecca has great vocal fun with this Ella Fitzgerald classic.

"My Honey is in Kentucky": That same hot Boston summer of '98 gave final form to this original composition, which Rebecca had begun writing a few years earlier. Those who have had the good fortune to travel through the Bluegrass State will appreciate both the musical tour and Rebecca's intro and subsequent lead.

"Dixie": Inspiration comes in many forms, and often occurs in quiet reflection. Rebecca left Boston in late 1998 for Telluride, Colorado, and this ballad about betrayal and redemptive trust came to her as she was on a river trail. Several years later she finalized the tune and musical arrangement.

"Shenandoah": Rebecca closes her CD with this favorite plaintive ballad of times and places past, as Darol's fiddle work winds around Rebecca's lead and harmony vocals.

After we talked about the CD, *FGM* (always curious about how musicians create their styles) asked Rebecca about how she develops her solos. "I do have a 'lick library' I've developed from transcribing, but when I practice I work out a lot of musical ideas. I record a lot of my playing, and if I find something I like I'll record it before I can forget it. Then I can come back to it later. For example, the opening to 'Faithless Love' started as a study in arpeggios. When I'm building a break, I'll stick to the tune and build from that. My jazz solos, obviously, are a little less to-the-tune, but when I'm flatpicking a fiddle tune that tune has to be obvious."

Finally, *FGM* asked Rebecca to describe how she became a flatpicker, and her thoughts on women flatpickers. "Originally, I was primarily a vocalist who played guitar. Then in 1997 I signed up for Steve Kaufman's Flatpicking Kamp. I had just decided to really focus on flatpicking, and the Kamp was exactly the opportunity I needed. When I got there I discovered I was one of three women among about 150 guys. That was scary, but whatever fears I may have had about being new or female quickly dissolved. I found a supportive and welcoming community of artists. Not that I found flatpicking easy, by any means. I've spent lots of hours getting to a point where I feel comfortable with my skills where they are right now. But you've got to push, as well. I practiced 'Big Mon' to use in competitions. I've only competed in two—Park City, Utah and Rockygrass—and that was a frightening experience. But I got through it. I think that's a big part: simply deciding to do it, and then putting in the time to accomplish the goal. Lots of time.

"As to why there aren't more women flatpickers, I can't say. I hope other women have had the same experience I've had, and found that supportive community. I've met a few women who play, and tried to encourage them in the same way I was—and am still being—encouraged. I'm not exactly sure why there aren't more women flatpickers, although I'd like there to be. I can't see why there shouldn't be."

"One technique that I've found really useful is to find a picking buddy, someone who can be both critical and encouraging, someone who expects the same from you. That kind of honest relationship—what I call 'workshopping'—allows both of you to grow as musicians. You trade licks and have focused, directed practice with results. For example, the instrumental 'Big Hogg' came out of trading a Bryan Sutton lick with Todd Livingston. You can practice all you want by yourself—that's woodshedding—but nothing compares with the live feedback you get from playing with other musicians. That's where you learn to play, because music is really an interactive process. So the next step is getting into an ensemble, a band, and learning those dynamics. It's been really interesting being both a picker and singer. I've found picking jam sessions and singing jam sessions; similar skills, different focus."

"And I'm not talking about playing with just bluegrass musicians. I can't count the number of great musicians I've met who encourage an 'open ear.' You've got to listen to all kinds of music from all over the world to develop an awareness of music in general. Sure, it's about how Doc Watson may play a tune, but it's also about how a tenor saxaphonist plays, or how a how a piano or clarinet plays a piece of music. The more you listen the more aware you can become, and that's when you can start to select how you want your music to sound."

So, what's next for Rebecca? "Well, obviously I'll continue working on flatpicking. Lots to learn. But now I also want to work on improving my voice, the tone and phrasings. I was lucky to have a great voice coach who suggested that I routinely record what I sing and listen critically to it. That's tough, but no tougher than listening to recordings of myself flatpicking. I'm also enjoying working with three different bands, but it doesn't leave a lot of spare time. As to the 'next CD,' I think maybe getting a band working tight together and recording that would be great, but that's a ways off. I recorded the selections on *Born in East Virginia* because they 'felt good.' It seemed to be the right time, and with Jim's help, the right folks."

We can only agree. Be sure to listen to "East Virginia" on the audio CD with this issue of FGM. For more information on Rebecca, ordering information for her CD, and performance schedules for the three bands Rebecca plays in, check out www.rebeccahoggan.com.

Rebecca's break to the title cut of her CD is transcribed on the next page.

East Virginia

Arranged by Rebecca Hoggan
Transcribed by Brad Davis

Reviews

I Don't Need The Whiskey Anymore
Jack Lawrence
G-RUN RECORDS GRR1002

Reviewed by Steve Snyder

Warning!! Jack Lawrence's long awaited new CD may be addictive. *I Don't Need The Whiskey Anymore* will have you tapping your foot and stretching your vocal chords. Yep, that's right, stretching your vocal chords.

Jack's masterful guitar playing is legendary, and though we are used to seeing and hearing Jack play with Doc, some of us have been fortunate enough to see him do his solo act, and also play in band situations. Jack can sing with the most soothing voice, and you can hear that in the very first song "McKinley Blues." With a back-up group of musicians that Jack not only counts as friends, but also reveres as his heroes, how can you go wrong? Sam Bush (mandolin), Jerry Douglas (dobro), Don Lewis (fiddle), and Robbie Link (bass) are just the beginning; there are more surprises!

The Del McCoury Band plays back-up and you can hear Del's high pitched harmony on the title song "I Don't Need The Whiskey Anymore," which was co-written by Jack with Roger Rasnake who wrote 3 other songs on this CD. I believe if the country radio stations get a hold of this, it just might be a hit. Del and the boys also play with Jack on "To Prove My Love To You" written by Leroy McNees, the original dobro player for the Kentucky Colonels

Jack's selection of tunes is outstanding, and his choice of musical partners couldn't be better. He does a wonderful version of John Hartford's "Steamboat Whistle Blues" that I'm sure is making John smile. A Norman Blake tune "When The Fields Are White with Daisies" has some lovely sounding harmonies, and there's even a song written by Dickey Betts (Allman Brothers) "Blue Sky" on which Jack playing guitar and mandolin.

I don't want to spoil the fun and tell you every song and who does what. You need to get this one, pop it in your CD player, sit back and listen, learn, and start tapping your foot and singing along. You just might get caught walking through the store singing "Through The Country." This is what good music is and should be, a collaboration of great friends, musicians, and songwriters.

To get a copy of this CD you can write Jack at P.O. Box 1053, Harrisburg, NC 28075. Those of you who are on the FLATPICK-L list can reach him from there, and I wouldn't be surprised if the FGM Mercantile has a few copies….Check it out!

Orrin Star's
Flatpicking Guitar Primer
What The Tab Won't Tell You

A comprehensive introduction to bluegrass lead guitar playing by one of America's top flatpicking teachers, this video brings to light vital, yet often overlooked, subtleties that are at the heart of this exciting style—those things that the tablature won't tell you. Among them:

- how to think like a fiddler and get the "dance pulse" into your playing
- the central role of strums in lead playing (as applied to Carter-style and Blake-style)
- right hand fundamentals like: how to properly alternate your pick, how to modify your right hand technique when strumming, performing double-stops, and rest strokes
- the role of double-stops and harmonized leads
- using lyrics & singing styles to guide your solos

Starting with a simple scale and then progressing through eight cool arrangments of classic tunes, this 2-hour video doesn't just spoon feed you solos—it provides a systematic guide to the thinking behind and within the style.

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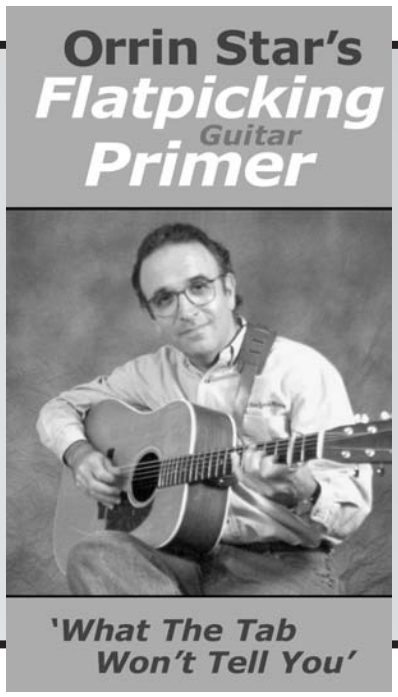

John Reischman & The Jaybirds
Copper Creek Records,
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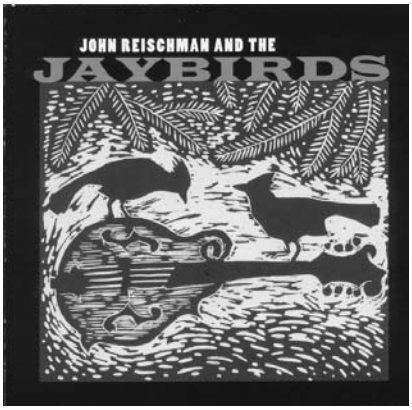


reviewed by Chris Thiessen

We need to hear our musical idols play in ensembles. Although it's great to hear their solo instrumental projects, we can appreciate their full range of vocal and musical skills much more when we hear them working within the fabric of a band. And this CD provides exactly that. Of course, you're going to hear John Reischman, but he's gathered around him some of the Northwest's great musicians to create a CD gem. Fellow British Columbian Trisha Gagnon plays bass and switches between lead and tenor vocals; Seattle's Nick Hornbuckle plays rock-steady banjo and contributes several original compositions to the project; Spokane fiddler Greg Spatz demonstrates his facility in expertly moving between old-time and bluegrass genres, and California's Jim Nunally pulls double duty as guitarist and co-producer (we'll talk about that in a minute). John Reischman not only plays but sings, trading lead, baritone, and low tenor with Trisha.

Produced on the Copper Creek label (known primarily for its expanding catalog of old-time and bluegrass recordings), *John Reischman & The Jaybirds* presents six instrumentals and eight vocals. "Salt Spring," a Reischman original, leads off. It's a great "building" tune: John and Nick begin and are then joined by Greg who provides a sinuous background fiddle line underscoring the banjo and mandolin. Trisha initially provides a sparse bass line until Greg's fiddle lead jumps front and center, and the entire band joins in, trading leads for the rest of the tune. (For the record, I especially enjoyed Jim Nunally's clean and precise guitar solo.)

I liked it. In fact, I played the tune a couple more times before moving along to the next cut, "Winter's Come and Gone," a ballad about the coming of spring. John sings lead to Trisha's tenor, all underpinned by an old-time accompaniment. Again (hey, I'm writing for *Flatpicking Guitar Magazine*, right?), I was struck by Jim Nunally's simple guitar break: nothing apparently complex, but just the right number of notes in just the right places to support the feeling of the song.

And it finally hit me: this music is elegant, as in "restrained beauty of style." Running through each cut on this CD is an extraordinarily high level of selective musical artistry that creates a deceptive simplicity. I don't doubt that each of these folks is a monster talent fully capable of executing dazzlingly complex music, but on this project they are laser-focused on selecting the right number of notes to move the music forward. Not too many, not too few, but just enough. That's why the vocals on "Blossoms on the Almond Tree" or "Katy Dear" or "Come With Me" sound the way they do, and that's why each of the instrumental breaks on "Poisoning the Well" or "Jaybird Ramble" or "Hog Eye" or any other tune sounds the way it does. This is art, and even more enjoyable, listenable and appreciable art. Whether it's a "bluegrass" or "old time" tune, the Jaybirds are exercising tremendous restraint individually and collectively to produce elegant music as a band.

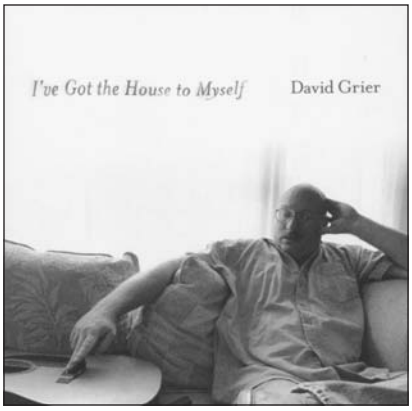
And that simplicity causes you to question a lot of things. I've always loved Tim O'Brien's version of "Bravest Cowboy," but Trisha's version of the tune on this CD calls that into question. That's dangerous! That's seditious! That's art!

Finally, one of the hidden wonders with this CD is its production. A great producer works invisible magic behind the musicians, performing at least three functions simultaneously: creating a smooth musical fabric that equally balances the sounds of all instruments; spotlighting each solo as it rises from the mix and ensuring that it returns to the fabric smoothly and effortlessly; and balancing the vocals so that no one voice overpowers another. John Reischman and Jim Nunally shared producing efforts on this CD, and their collaboration adds a three-dimensional luster to an already superb project.

In summation, this CD is 42-minutes of must-have music. Run, do not walk to your nearest CD emporium and order it immediately!

Song List: Salt Spring; Winter's Come and Gone; My Home Far Away; Don't Wake Me Up; Come With Me; Poisoning the Well; Katy Dear; Booth Shot Lincoln; Bravest Cowboy; Medicine Springs; Jaybird Ramble; Blossoms on the Almond Tree; Prairie Girl; Hog Eye

David Grier
I've Got the House to Myself
Dreadnought Records 0201



Reviewed by Steve Palazzo

For you traditional oriented flatpickers this is the David Grier CD that you've been waiting for. The aptly titled *I've Got The House To Myself* consists of ten flatpicking favorites (two different versions of "Sally Gooden"!) plus two originals. Battle tested standards like "Arkansas Traveler," "Bill Cheatum" and "Turkey In The Straw" get new life breathed into them under the always innovative hands of David Grier.

The fact that this CD finds David playing solo makes this a particularly interesting recording. Hearing him stretch out unaccompanied on these tunes brings to mind the solo recordings that piano giant Art Tatum did for Norman Granz in the early 1950s. In both instances you have these instrumental masters in an informal studio setting romping through the standard repertoire of their respective genres. Constantly digging deeper into each tune to see what it will yield.

While the challenges of playing solo flatpick style guitar are enormous, Grier rises to the occasion. His playing is most often not of the linear fiddle-style phrasing (except when he chooses to), but of rolls and runs with the melody constantly weaving through chords. This approach sometimes deceives you into thinking that there are two guitars playing. Just as you start to become comfortable with this illusion on

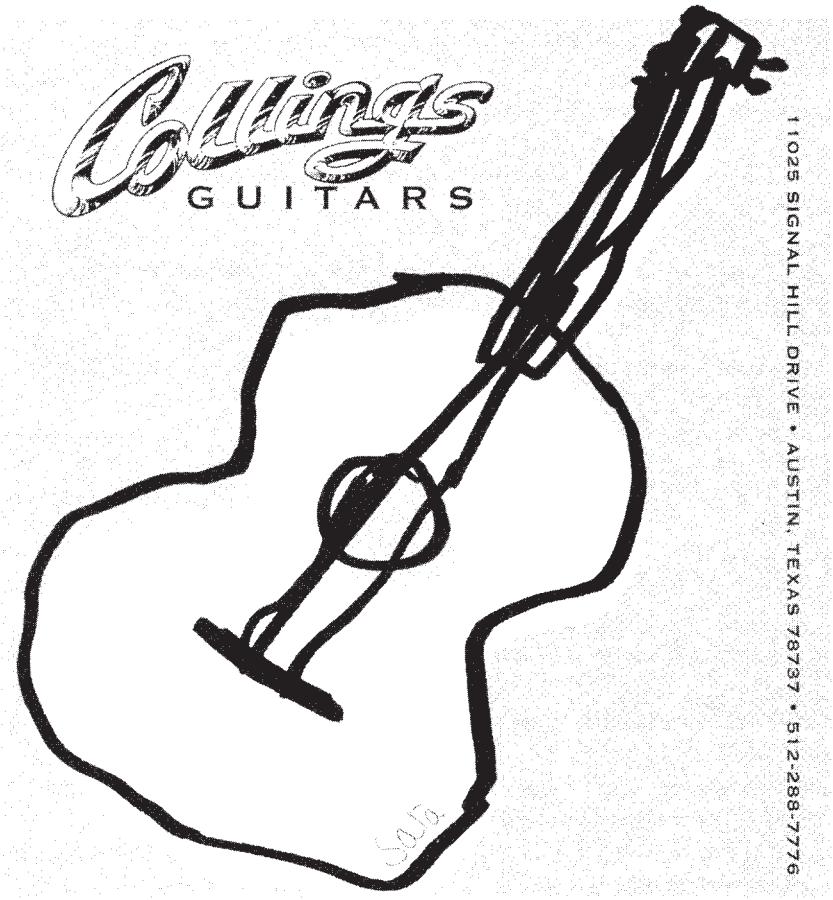
"Turkey In The Straw," Grier actually does indeed dub a second guitar part that appears out of nowhere. From the CD's opening notes of "Bill Cheatum" the excitement begins as Grier spins one gorgeous break after another with seemingly endless melodic and rhythmic variations.

"Arkansas Traveler" echoes with an unspoken tribute to that pioneering master of the solo flatpick style, Norman Blake. Hearing how he approaches the "B" part of "Arkansas Traveler" shows that Grier has absorbed much of Blakes playing without feeling constrained by simply mimicking him.

Grier gets into open-D tuning for a bluesy rumination on "Evening Prayer Blues." That steel-driving man "John Henry" gets a high octane workout as David takes it's sparse melody and and plays it in a self contained style before embarking on a wild single note flurry.

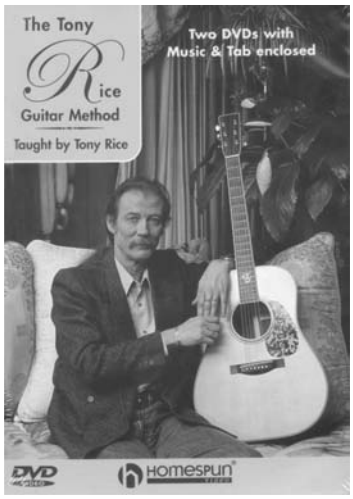
The title cut "I've Got The House To Myself" is a catchy medium tempo tune that Grier accompany's himself with on a second rhythm guitar. The other original, "Coices We've Made" is a very pensive piece. The "Black Mountain Rag" gets treated to endless variations in both keys of "A" & "D".

David Grier seems to milk every last drop of tone out of each note he plays. That alone would rank him among the greatest stylists of his craft, but he brings so much more to the table. His frightening mastery of time, whether playing solo or with an ensemble, and his ability to subdivide it into the most deceptive segments distances David Grier from the rest of his contemporaries in the flatpicking world. Like all great art it reveals more and more with each successive listening. If it were possible to truly describe music with words, then there would be no need to listen to it. Pick up this CD and treat yourself!



Instructional Book and Video Reviews

The Tony Rice Guitar Method Taught by Tony Rice with Wyatt Rice DVD-RIC-GT29 Homespun Tapes



Reviewed by Bryan Kimsey

If this is your first experience with DVD, Tony Rice, and Homespun Tapes all at the same time, don't be surprised if your head explodes from the sudden rush of information. The combination of digital video, Rice's mastery of the instrument, and Happy Traum's experience in capturing that information is potent. Consider yourself warned! Fortunately for me, I had already seen Rice's previous Homespun offering and I've seen dozens of Homespun's other tapes, so I only had to deal with the DVD aspect. In fact, I went out and bought a DVD player specifically so that I could review this new release! And, am I glad I did!

First, what does this new lesson add to the previous one? If you already have the first lesson, what more is there to the Tony Rice style? I have a mental image of an iceberg here for some reason but all I can see is the tip of it Let's put it this way, the 2 DVDs (or videos, if that's the case) here could easily be doubled and we'd still be wanting more. On the first tape, Rice pretty much just played some tunes and then broke them down slowly. There was little between-song talking. That ratio is reversed here. There is a lot of talking, with Happy Traum tossing out questions and observations and Rice taking it from there. It's very much like an interview session. Traum asks some very good questions and cuts right to particulars of the Tony Rice style, rather than dwelling on "general" guitarist questions. Regarding the songs, Rice plays them, but spends relatively little time breaking them down segment by segment. Instead, he talks about the concepts and influences behind the arrangements, giving much credit where credit is due. As a relatively advanced guitarist myself, I get much more out of this approach than the note-for-note lessons. There's a place for both, of course, but when watching the latter, I'm really more interested in the thought process behind those notes. I want to take the elements of the style I'm learning and incorporate it into my own style, rather than mimic it. And that's what this lesson offers. In addition to what Tony actually says, the astute learner can gain a lot by simply watching Rice's hands and attack on the strings. This is a very valuable aspect of the video format that you can't gain by simply listening to a CD.

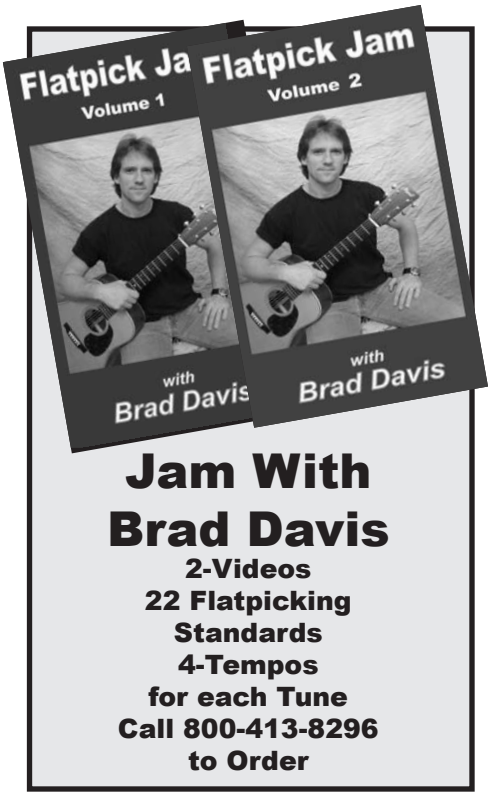
Rice goes through a variety of tunes and covers the various facets of his style, from the chord based crosspicked tunes like "Last Thing On My Mind" to straight out fiddle tunes like "Stoney Lonesome" and "Salt Creek" to the intricate jazzy chord solos of "Shenandoah" and the revamped "Manzanita". "Nine Pound Hammer" is here and Rice illustrates his approach to improvising on this simple tune. Other tunes include "Billy in the Lowground", "Bill Cheatam", "Little Sadie" (with historical variations), "Jerusalem Ridge", "I Am a Pilgrim" and more.

While the Rice lead style is one thing, his rhythm style is in a class of its own and is well-covered here on the second half of DVD #2. Wyatt Rice plays lead and Tony plays rhythm and then they discuss what went on. Tony also talks a bit about how his rhythm style has changed, both over time and with different ensembles. It's a great discussion.

There is also a good discussion on microphones and recording techniques in which Tony explains why he uses what he uses. The microphones are right there during the lesson, and the sound quality is exceptionally good, especially in the DVD format. Rice plays both his Santa Cruz custom model and his old Martin and talks a good deal about both of them. I wish the cameraman would've zoomed in a little and really given us a good look at both guitars (the backs are never shown, for instance), but most people are just not the gearhead that I am. Even so, I got a good look at the saddles and actions and tops on both guitars.

Now, about that DVD formatif you don't have one, they're cool. You can jump to anywhere in the disc instantly, slow down things (mine goes to 1/8) with crystal clarity, zoom in, fast forward, mark spots, and so on. It is a superb medium for lessons- no more fast forwarding, stopping, fast forward, stop, fast forward, oops-too far, rewind, stop. Just pick your track and go there. The sound is CD quality and the video is noticeably sharper, fuller, and richer than VHS. And they're no more expensive than VHS.

To sum it up, "The Tony Rice Guitar Method" is essential viewing for all flatpickers. You've simply got to have a copy of this lesson, preferrably in DVD although VHS will suffice. It's the kind of lesson that you watch over and over and pick up little things here and there each time. Thank you Happy Traum for the interview type approach and thank you Tony Rice for taking the time and effort to do this!



Gear Review

by Dan Miller

The Summit Guitar Pack

Whenever I leave the house with my guitar, unless I am going to be traveling by plane, I always carry the guitar in a gig bag. A gig bag is lightweight and thus easy to manage. Additionally, I usually carry a small backpack for camera and minidisc recording equipment and I carry a lightweight nylon briefcase that I have stuffed with articles and tabs that I am working on for the magazine. Fortunately for me the smart folks at the Summit Guitar Pack Company have made a gig bag that includes the features of my gig bag, back pack, and briefcase rolled into one. Now when I leave the house, I carry only one bag—The Summit Guitar Pack.

When the bag arrived from Summit I was immediately impressed with its sturdiness, high quality, and superior workmanship. Every feature of this bag has been manufactured using top-of-the-line materials. Some of the features which are unique to this bag and immediately caught my attention include:

- A detachable auxiliary bag (briefcase)
- Contoured shoulder straps and waist belt that stash under a hideaway zippered flap when not in use.
- Convenient strap loops on the upper part of the front and middle of the back.
- An adjustable bungee cord lacing for quick stowage of miscellaneous items.
- A reflective strip for increased night-visibility.

I received my bag shortly before Merlefest this year and I had the opportunity to "road test" it at both Merlefest and the Gettysburg Bluegrass Festival. While this bag probably weighs more than other bags that I have used, I really didn't notice the weight difference. What I did notice, however, was that this bag feels sturdier than other bags I own and thus I felt that my guitar was being better protected. The many sturdy handles (three) on the bag's exterior made it easy to move in and out of the car or from place-to-place at our booth.

I was very appreciative of the fact that the back pack straps are kept under a zippered

flap when they are not in use. I have used other gig bags that have back pack straps, but do not have this feature, and sometimes the straps can get in the way when carrying the bag at your side by the carrying handle and they can get caught up when sliding the bag in and out of a vehicle. When I opted to use the back pack feature, I found the back pack straps to be very comfortable and they came in handy during long treks across campground areas in search of jam sessions.

I used the accessory bag (which also comes with its own carrying strap) to carry all of my mini-disc recording gear, a digital camera, extra strings, and paperwork. It was very nice having all of that gear in one place. When I went out to jam, I simply detached the bag and left it in the car. I kept my capo, picks, and tune in a small padded bag (not included) which I placed inside the gig bag under the neck of the guitar.

After receiving the Summit bag, I began to others carrying them. When guitar players walked by our booth at Merlefest carrying the Summit bag (usually utilizing the back pack feature) I asked them what they thought of the bag. Everyone's reply was the same, "I love it!"

The bag I was sent for review was the Summit dreadnought bag. Summit also makes similar bags for classical guitars, electric guitars, electric basses, and banjos. They also make a nice hard-case cover backpack which includes the same features as the gig bag.

Whenever we receive high dollar items in to our office for review the understanding with the manufacturer is that we will then return the item after the review has been written. After having had the opportunity to use this gig bag I did not want to send it back and contacted Summit Guitar Pack President Jory Kahn to tell him that instead of sending him his gig bag back I would be sending him a check. That is the bottom line—I liked the bag so much I had to have it. The bag retails for $149.95. My opinion is that it is worth the price.

For more information about Summit Guitar Pack products, visit their website: www.guitarbackpack.com.

I am responding to the article entitled "Merrill Brothers Update" by Skip Staples which appeared in the January-February 2002 edition. It conveyed only a fraction of how remarkable it really is that the Merrill brothers have reappeared as successful luthiers after their experience with their former "business associate" who did everything he could to destroy them. This included many ugly personal and character references he spread about them that took "acrimonious" to the very limits of its definition.

Over a year ago, my wife ordered a guitar for me from The Merrill Guitar Company—before the breakup. It was to be a Christmas present, and she made payments between the time she ordered it and the company's demise. She managed to pay two thirds of the price of a Honduran rosewood dreadnaught. And she had kept it a secret from me so that it would be a surprise. She even continued to send payments to Jim Merrill when he assured her that he would make the guitar. It was then that I found out about her plan, and I am afraid that I advised her that to go on would be asking for trouble. The former "business associate," had taken all the money from the company claiming it as his, and that's when I contacted him. And listened to all the things he had to say about Jim, Jim's family and ancestors clear back to Adam. This "business associate" assured me I would get my wife's money back (over two thousand dollars) when the court sorted out the settlement issues. He also assured me that I would never get a cent back out of Jim!

Well, we waited and waited, hired a lawyer to write the proper letters and waited some more. My wife even called the Jim Merrill's former business associate and was assured that because she was such a nice person, she would get her money returned. He would see to it. Personally. Three weeks ago, our lawyer received a letter from his lawyer stating that we would not be getting any money back. The letter recommended that we get our money from Jim Merrill.

Happily, once Jim got back on his feet, he sent back all the money that my wife had sent directly to him. Also, he offered to build the guitar she ordered and charge only the money that remained for her to pay on the original order! It might be a good idea if his former "business associate" took some lessons from Jim Merrill on how to be honorable and to keep his word like a man.

I look forward to the guitar that Jim will build for me, and to keeping him as a friend and business associate in the future, and my wife and I wish him the very best as he moves on towards his destiny as a respected world class guitar builder. It's a Merrill family business, now. That's how Martin & Company got started, too.

Sincerely, Henry Stocek

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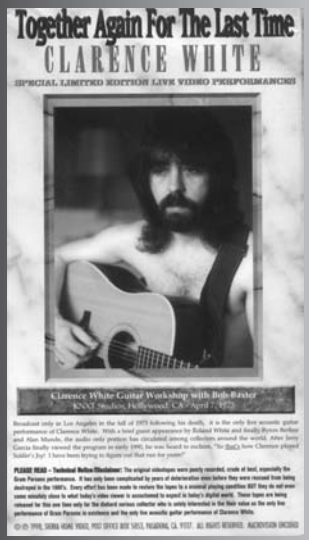
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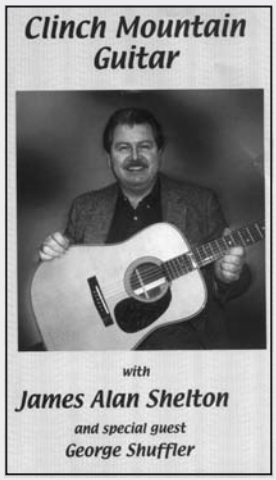

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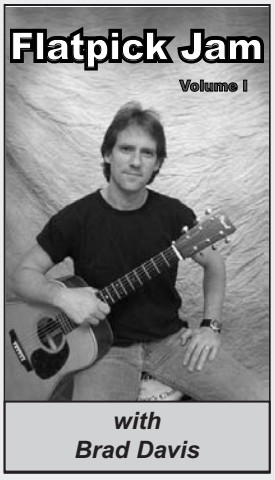

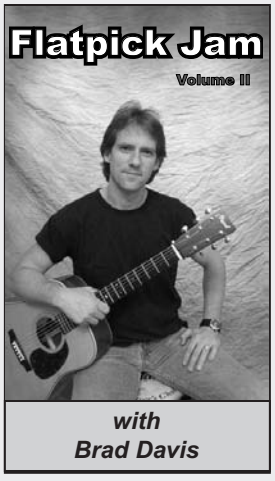

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"My friends all laughed when I said 'I'll sing harmony.' But they didn't know my secret..."

I never was any kind of singer, I could play a few instruments okay, but when everybody leaned their heads together for some harmonizing, I just didn't fit in. I couldn't hear what vocal went where! I just figured it took talent to be able to sing harmony, and I didn't have it.

Then I met this guy at the festival in Bean Blossom. We were doing a little shade-tree picking, and he was singing wonderfully. When we finished "Will the Circle Be Unbroken," he asked me why I didn't join in on harmony.

"I can't harmonize," I said. "I didn't want to mess up your singing by sounding like a bullfrog in heat."

"Sure you can harmonize! Why, I'd even give you this guitar if I can't teach you right now how to do the tenor harmony!"

Well, he had me singing a good tenor harmony so easily I just couldn't believe it. Singing harmony was a skill, not a big mystery!

"How did you learn to teach harmony like that?"

"It's not hard," he replied. "let me loan you my CDs, and you'll see my secret."

He handed me a CD pack entitled "how To Sing Bluegrass Harmony"--a mail-order course! I never bought a mial-order course. I just couldn't thrust I'd get good instruction from something I couldn't try out right away.

He told me, "This course came with a guarantee...if I didn't think it was good within 10 days, I'd get my money back. And it couldn't hurt to try it with a guarantee!"

"But you could sing harmony a little, so you could learn quicker--"

"nope! I sang harmonhy like a bullfrog in heat, too!"

We laughed, and he left me with a cheerful, "Try those tapes out."

Well, I played that course all the way home in my car, and I sang til I was hoarse. I sure felt like I was learning... but the real test was yet to come.

Next Tuesday I met with my pickin" buddies, like I always do. Just before we started "Fox On The Run," I told my friends I was going to sing harmonhy. They all laughed (I knew they would), and Charlie cracked, "What kind of harmony? Froggy tenor?"

"Let's just do it," Isaid. "I got a surprise for you boys."

They kept giggling, but you should've seen their faces when I started singing harmony. They were amazed. Charlie even accused me of getting 'harmony surgery' instead of going to Bean Blossom. Naturally, they all wanted to learn mhy secret. I just smiled, and said "Harmony singing is a skill as much as a gift. And this course got me working mhy skill the right way."

If you never thought you could sing bluegrass harmony, you ought to try this course. It's guaranteed. And who knows---your "bullfrog tenor" days may soon be over!

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How to Sing Gospel Harmony Going Up, Farther Along, It's Me Again Lord, What a Friend We Have in Jesus, Prayer Bells from Heaven, Preachin' Prayin' Singin', Happy on My Way, He Will Set Your Fields on Fire, Let the Sun Shine Down, Hallelujah I'm Ready, Gathering Flowers for the Master's Bouquet, Heaven's Light Shining on Me, Jordan, Are You Washed in the Blood of the Lamb, Over in the Gloryland, The Wicked Path of Sin, Life's Railway to Heaven, Brush Arbor Meeting, Put Your Hand in the Hand, Just a Little Talk with Jesus. (2 CD's) $24.95

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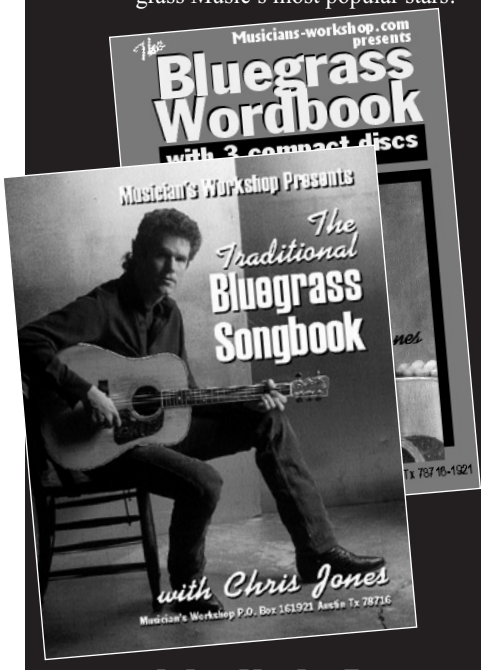

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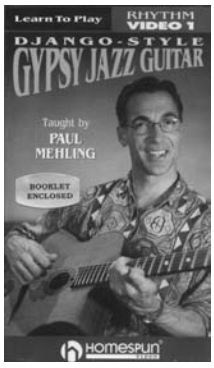

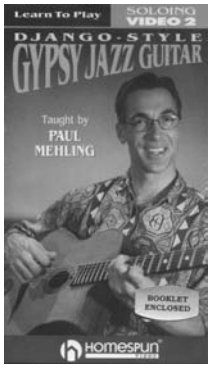

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Blue Moon Guitars & Music
West Jefferson, NC 28694
Phone: 336-246-3275

Broadway Sound
Knoxville, TN 37917
Phone: 865-637-1644

Buffalo Bros. Vintage Guitars
Carlsbad, CA. 92009
Phone: 760-434-4567

Bucks County Folk Music Shop
New Britain, PA 18901
Phone: 215-345-0616

Celestial Mtn. Music
Brevard, NC 28712
Phone: 828-884-3575

Custom Fretted Instruments
Sparta, TN 38583
Phone: 931-657-2398

Janet Davis Music
Bentonville, AR 72712
Phone: 479-855-0700

Davis & Sons Guitar Shop
Camden, SC 29020
Phone: 803-713-1000

Discount Music LLC
Chamblee, GA 30341
Phone: 770-457-3400

Fireside Music
Memphis, TN 38125
Phone: 901-507-6535

Fretted Instruments
Birmingham, AL 35409
Phone: 205-879-6489

Minor Chord
Acton, MA 01720
Phone: 978-264-0299

The Music Barn, Inc.
Greensboro, NC 27403
Phone: 336-272-2118

Music Folk
Webster Groves, MO 63119
Phone: 314-961-2838

My Favorite Guitars
Naples, FL 34112
Phone: 239-530-7425

Scales Street Music
Reidsville, NC 27320
Phone: 336-349-3000

T. G. Music
Goshen, IN 46526
Phone: 219-534-1243

Vic's Guitar Cave
Forest Grove, OR 97116
Phone: 503-357-2787

Gallagher Guitars
P.O Box 128
Wartrace, TN. 37183
Ph./Fax: 931-389-6455
www.gallagherguitar.com

I hear the train a comin', it's rollin' 'round the bend,

And I ain't seen the sunshine since I don't know when.

I'm stuck in Folsom Prison and time keeps draggin' on.

But that train keeps rollin' on down to San Antone.

– recorded live behind bars on a model D-28, Folsom Prison, 1968

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